

Fauci warns against herd immunity: “The death toll would be enormous”

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Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID), was interviewed yesterday by actor Matthew McConaughey (*Free State of Jones*) on the state of the coronavirus pandemic in the United States.

During the course of the interview, McConaughey asked, “If everyone in the world contracts the disease, what happens to it? Does it go away on its own?” Fauci definitively warned that, “If everyone contracted it ... a lot of people are going to die.”

The day before, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Robert Redfield similarly cautioned in an interview with WebMD that because “we’re going to have COVID in the fall, and we’re going to have flu in the fall,” the country could be hit with “the worst fall, from a public health perspective, we’ve ever had.” The combination is almost certain to “stress certain hospital systems” beyond what they are capable of handling.

In his understated way, Fauci spelled out the imminent danger of any policy of “herd immunity” gained through letting the country or the world’s population become infected with the virus. The current low end estimates of COVID-19’s mortality rate given by the World Health Organization is 0.6 percent, and at least half of the population has to become immune to halt the spread of the disease in this manner. Taken together, this translates to a minimum of 23 million dead worldwide from the pandemic, including more than 993,000 in the US alone.

As Fauci put it, “The death toll would be enormous and totally unacceptable.” The current death toll in the US is more than 171,000, along with 5.4 million cases, already a staggering figure. To achieve the minimum estimate of herd immunity would require a scale of death six times greater than the tally already taken.

The interview between Fauci and McConaughey took place the same day the CDC released new estimates for the death toll in the United States, predicting there will be 200,000 reported deaths by the first week of September if the daily death rates in every state hold steady or decrease

slightly. If the death rates begin to increase again, there could be as many as 225,000 deaths by Labor Day. The CDC’s estimate incorporates that of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, which predicted last week that 295,000 people will die by December 1.

Fauci also spent some time discussing the difference between the response to the pandemic in Asia and the United States. “When [Asian countries] shut down,” he explained, their daily coronavirus case numbers, “went down to a very, very low baseline.” The United States, in contrast, “went up and instead of going all the way down, we plateaued at 20,000 cases a day, which is completely unacceptable.” And then, when we started to “open up America again ... we didn’t do that in a uniform way.” Fauci continued that, “So what happened, as we started to open, it went up to thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and we peaked at seventy thousand [new cases] a day. We’re down now to fifty, but we should have gone all the way down to practically nothing, and we didn’t.”

What Fauci does not clarify, however, is that “we,” the population as a whole, did not make the decision to reopen factories, offices and business and thus induce millions of infections and tens of thousands of deaths. Ignoring the explicit warnings of experts on the pandemic, the financial oligarchy that rules this country, and who have experienced the coronavirus in a profoundly different way from the working class, made that decision.

From the beginning, the main concern of the corporate elite and its political flunkies in the Democratic and Republican parties was to protect their wealth, and the capitalist profit system upon which it is based. The death toll was not a concern when the pandemic began to spread across the US in March, but the precipitous drop in the stock market was.

In response, this layer demanded from the United States government a blank check to prop up the financial markets and to fill the vaults of the corporations. While Trump and his coterie sang the refrain that there was “no money” to establish a mass testing and contact tracing system in the

United States to contain and eradicate the deadly contagion, the president worked diligently with Congress to enact a \$6,000,000,000,000 bailout.

Even the most generous estimates from economists, including one from *Politico*, show that at most eight percent of the bailout was directed at measures to end the virus itself, including making more personal protective equipment, working on treatments, expanding contact tracing, implementing mass testing and working on a vaccine. About one-twentieth went toward the stimulus checks that Americans without a job were supposedly to survive on for months on end. Everything else went into the already overflowing coffers of the super-rich.

At the same time, such sums had to be paid for. Just as trillions had been handed to Wall Street, trillions now have to be extracted from the labor of the working class. Thus Trump began to falsely claim that, “Our people want to return to work.” The fact that these reckless actions have been proven to spread the pandemic and have cost thousands of lives is of little interest to Trump, or the social interests he represents.

Instead, workers are being forced back into contaminated plants and infected factories under a *de facto* policy of herd immunity. In order to pay for the crisis, the ruling elite has sent millions back to work in deadly conditions, ones that are allowing the pandemic to spread throughout communities, killing and maiming thousands. If allowed to continue, Trump’s actions will make Fauci’s warnings a living nightmare.

This homicidal, one might argue genocidal, policy is being pursued ever more vigorously now that fall has come and, according to Trump, “schools must open!!!” Trump knows that the only way to complete the economic reopening is get children back to school so their parents can get sent back to work. The excuse that children seem to be less susceptible to the deadlier consequences of the pandemic is being used to justify a mass reopening of schools. This has already caused a massive spread of COVID-19, both among children and their more susceptible older friends and relatives.

In a rational world, instead of using children to spread disease, the US ruling elite would have taken stock of their reopening policy and listened to the medical experts, such as those who penned a letter titled “Shut it down, start over, do it right.” Signed by hundreds of doctors, nurses and other medical personnel, it notes that if the US government’s response “had been as effective as South Korea, Australia, or Singapore’s, fewer than 2,000 Americans would have died.” The letter continues that “99 percent of those COVID-19 deaths” could have been prevented.

A similar appeal was made by the World Health Organization on Thursday, calling for a vast influx of funds

to combat the pandemic. Speaking for the organization, Director-General Dr. Tedros stated, “Before spending another \$10 trillion US dollars on the consequences of the next wave, we estimate that the world will need to spend at least \$100 billion US dollars on new tools, especially any new vaccines that are developed.”

This would include a massively expanded testing regime in the US, instead of one which is steadily shrinking and has been since late July, even as the pandemic continues to spread. Brett Giroir, assistant secretary of Health and Human Services and head of the Trump administration’s testing strategy, snapped at reporters who Thursday questioned the drop in testing, claiming that “We are doing the appropriate amount of testing now to reduce the spread, flatten the curve, save lives.” He then dismissed critics as “people who are peddling numbers.”

That so many have died and so much money has been directed towards the financial elite, however, is not a question of correct policy, but demanded by the logic of capitalism itself. It is ultimately cheaper to let workers die and replace them than implement the necessary measures to halt the pandemic in its tracks—testing, contact tracing, quarantine, production of PPE, etc. Such things cost money and getting extra workers is essentially free, especially with tens of millions now unemployed.

But to actually implement these life-saving measures requires a new political orientation, one not directed at the decrepit and murderous policies of the capitalist class and their political parties, but to the working class. Only through a transfer of political power to workers themselves, bound up with the fight for socialist policies in a struggle against capitalism itself, can the coronavirus pandemic be contained and ultimately ended.



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