

The plot against America and the world: How the US government and the media suppressed the truth about the COVID-19 pandemic

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On Wednesday, senior *Washington Post* reporter and establishment insider Bob Woodward released recordings of telephone calls with US President Donald Trump, making clear that the White House, despite its public efforts to downplay the threat of COVID-19, was fully aware in January of the massive danger posed by the deadly new disease.

The tapes establish that the Trump administration lied to the public about the threat while it deliberately implemented a policy that has led to the deaths of nearly 200,000 people.

During the critical period of January through March, when timely actions, similar to those taken in China, would have saved hundreds of thousands of lives in the United States and internationally, the White House made a cold-blooded decision to lie to the public, in an unprecedented crime.

This was a plot against the people of America and the world.

On February 7, Trump told Woodward he had just had a conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping, who had provided the American president with a clear and blunt assessment of the dangers posed by the pandemic. "This is deadly stuff," Trump said. "It's also more deadly than... even your strenuous flus... this is five percent [case fatality rate] versus one percent and less than one percent."

These words were in flagrant contradiction to the statements Trump made in public over the following weeks and months, in which he equated the pandemic with the seasonal flu, promised it would "disappear," and claimed that cases were "going down."

Eschewing the antiscientific demagoguery of his public statements, Trump demonstrated a clear and precise understanding of the spread of the disease in his discussion with Woodward. "It goes through air, Bob. That's always tougher than the touch," Trump said, an appraisal fully in line with the current scientific consensus.

On January 28, according to Woodward's account, Trump was told by his national security adviser, Robert C. O'Brien, "This will be the biggest national security threat you face in your presidency... This is going to be the roughest thing you face."

Woodward occupies a unique position in American journalism, having been associated with the exposure of the Watergate conspiracy that led to President Richard Nixon's resignation in 1974. Since then, Woodward has made a career of using his virtually unlimited access to the upper echelons of the state to publish insider accounts of the White House under multiple administrations. The Trump tapes were made as part of interviews conducted for the publication of Woodward's new book on the Trump White House.

The fact that Woodward, who made his career publishing the results of the *Washington Post's* Watergate investigation day by day as it was occurring, withheld information that could have saved tens of thousands of lives, makes him, for all intents and purposes, an accessory to the crime

committed by the White House.

If Woodward has released these tapes now, after concealing them for six months, it is because the crisis over the upcoming election has massively exacerbated divisions within the state. But in choosing to release this information, Trump's factional opponents have implicated themselves as accomplices in a massive cover-up.

Trump and his cabinet would not have been the only ones to receive intelligence briefings on the pandemic. It is well known that high-ranking senators and members of the House of Representatives of both parties regularly receive briefings from the US intelligence agencies, and former presidents continue to receive access to intelligence information. These briefings, through the "anonymous sources" so often cited by the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, would have become known to the editors of the leading US newspapers.

Moreover, it is inconceivable that Woodward, having in his possession tapes that would have meant life or death for tens of thousands of people, would not have discussed them with his colleagues at the *Post* and other major news outlets.

In other words, Trump was not the only party to this conspiracy. The tapes constitute direct evidence that the media was aware of the dangers but refused to alert the American people.

The questions fundamental to the Watergate scandal, "What did the president know, and when did he know it?" have become expanded to "What did the government, Congress and the media know, and when did they know it?"

In a subsequent call on March 19, Trump explained to Woodward why he was seeking to downplay the danger of the disease. He said, "I always wanted to play it down... I still like playing it down, because I don't want to create a panic."

What "panic" was Trump speaking about? He was primarily concerned with containing a stock market selloff before the bailout of Wall Street had been prepared. Furthermore, with workers in factories increasingly uneasy about the spread of the disease, he was afraid of mass working class walkouts, such as those that ultimately led to the closure of the US auto plants in March.

Instead of alerting the public to what it knew in January, the government set to work preparing for an eruption of the pandemic, not through measures to contain the disease, but through the largest bailout of major corporations in world history, which was prepared in silence, with the public unaware.

When it became clear that lockdowns were unavoidable after the markets went into freefall in February and March, the government was ready with a \$6 trillion bailout, passed in record time. Then, with the bailout secured, it began the campaign to herd millions of workers into the factories and children into the schools.

The recordings of Trump's conversations with Woodward are a striking confirmation of the Socialist Equality Party's assessment, which explained in a statement published August 1 that the US government made a deliberate effort to suppress information about the pandemic:

Clearly, the United States government and its intelligence-gathering agencies understood by the first days of 2020—and, in all likelihood, by the second half of December—that the world stood on the very brink of a health care disaster.

Referring to the period between December and March, we wrote:

The Trump administration and congressional leaders of both capitalist parties—acting on the instructions of the corporate-financial elite—made the socially catastrophic decisions that prioritized the rescue of the banks, large corporations and powerful Wall Street investors, over preventing the spread of the pandemic and saving lives.

The statement continued:

Despite the extreme health danger posed by the spread of the pandemic, the ruling class was virtually exclusively concentrated on the economic impact of a pandemic, that is, how the disease would impact the stock market and the personal wealth of the richest one to five percent of society. The capitalist oligarchy feared, first of all, that unambiguous public acknowledgement of the danger would lead to a financial panic, causing the markets "to teeter and perhaps fall precipitously."

If Trump's statements had been made public earlier, tens or even hundreds of thousands of lives could have been saved. Medical experts, including those within the Trump administration itself, have blamed the massive resurgence of the pandemic in the United States on the merely partial implementation of lockdowns and their premature lifting. The release of these tapes earlier could have contributed to public demand for stricter lockdowns, saving countless lives.

Why, then, did Woodward wait to make the tapes public until lockdowns had been lifted in every state, workers herded into workplaces, and schools reopened?

The explanation given by Woodward himself, that he wanted to "check out" the story, cannot be taken seriously. He had tapes of the president admitting to deceiving the public. There was nothing to "check out."

There is another answer: that Woodward wanted to make more money while allowing tens of thousands of people to die by releasing the tapes closer to the publication date of his book. But this mercenary rationalization cannot explain the cover-up. No, the timing of Woodward's disclosures was a matter of state policy. A staple of the media establishment for decades, Woodward's reporting relies on a web of access and influence. His revelations are discussed, vetted and planned.

With as many as 5,000 people dying each day in March, it is inconceivable that he kept the tapes a secret to himself. He would have discussed them at least with others at the *Washington Post*, and the revelations were likely known high up in the *New York Times* editorial board and among ranking members of the Democratic Party.

Why would these figures not have encouraged Woodward to publish the

tapes earlier? If, as Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden now claims, the Democrats had been calling for a vigorous public health response to the pandemic, would the revelations not have strengthened their hand in the fight to contain the disease?

The truth is, if the tapes were not released it is because the Democrats did not want them released. Rhetoric aside, the Democrats have pursued a response to the pandemic largely indistinguishable from that of Trump.

While Trump was actively denying the threat of the pandemic, the Democrats merely kept silent. For an entire month, between January 29 and February 29, as the pandemic was taking hold in the United States, the *New York Times* did not publish a single editorial on the subject. Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein, following a January 24 briefing to the Senate Intelligence Committee, sold between \$1.5 million and \$6 million in stock ahead of the market crash, but did not alert the public to the threat.

Under conditions where the *New York Times* editors, with their "anonymous sources," likely knew the contents of the intelligence briefings given to the White House and the Senate, as well as, in all likelihood, the existence of Woodward's tapes, they allowed writers such as Thomas Friedman to publicly advocate for a policy of letting the pandemic run rampant on the basis of "herd immunity."

Declaring that Americans were "tired" and "weary" of lockdowns, despite polls showing the contrary, the *Post* and the *Times* promoted far-right demonstrations, some openly displaying swastikas, as legitimate expressions of the population's desire to end the lockdowns.

When the White House declared that it would be up to the governors to determine when states would reopen, every state in the union lifted its lockdown, with some Democratic states not even waiting for the reduction in cases mandated by the Centers for Disease Control's reopening guidelines.

The Democrats, just like Trump, speak for a ruling class that has been totally indifferent to the loss of life caused by the pandemic, concerned exclusively about its impact on the stock portfolios of the superrich.

Is it any coincidence, then, that Woodward's employer, Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, who owns the *Washington Post*, has seen his wealth nearly double over the past year, becoming the first human being with a net worth of over \$200 billion?

If Woodward's tapes have come out now, it is because of the conflict that has erupted within the ruling class over the election. But whatever the motivations of Trump's factional opponents, the tapes incriminate them no less than Trump.

Nothing the government and major media outlets say can be believed. If they hid these tapes, they can lie about anything. The urgent question that must now be raised is: What else is being concealed from the American people? No doubt, the media and the state are now in possession of information that, if released to the public, would immediately halt the reopening of schools and workplaces.

While the *Post* and the *Times* worked to cover up the conspiracy that unfolded this year, the *World Socialist Web Site* sought to expose it. It is no surprise that the campaign to downplay the pandemic has occurred at the same time as the efforts to censor the WSWS have intensified.

What is slowly unraveling is a conspiracy, orchestrated at the highest levels of the state and the capitalist oligarchy, to sacrifice human lives for profit. Trump, in all of his lies and criminality, was carrying out this class policy.

Trump is complicit in the deaths of 200,000 human beings. But so too are his co-conspirators in the media and political establishment. The death toll from the pandemic is a social crime for which the entire capitalist order is responsible.





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