Revelation of US government conspiracy on COVID-19 exposes EU herd immunity policy

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Revelations that Trump and other top US officials lied publicly about the danger posed by COVID-19 expose the politically criminal policy of the European Union (EU). While they had access to official briefings like those available to their US counterparts, they reproduced the same litany of lies and expressing the same flagrant contempt for their citizens' lives, advocating a policy of "herd immunity," that is, of controlled spread of the virus in the population.

This is a warning about European Union (EU) officials who are now demanding that workers and children return to work and to school despite an accelerating spread of the virus. Their statements on COVID-19 are worthless. Like Trump, they have a record making false public statements trivializing the pandemic, in flagrant contradiction with medical information they were receiving in private, to boost the stock markets and the wealth of the super-rich at the expense of workers' lives.

These revelations about Donald Trump, published by the well-known US journalist Bob Woodward, center on the American president's private knowledge of COVID-19, provided by intelligence briefings and discussions with Chinese officials. It is simply not credible to assert that EU officials did not have access to the same type of information as Trump.

On January 28, intelligence officials told Trump the pandemic would be "the biggest national security threat you face in your presidency." Then on February 7, Trump told Woodward that Chinese President Xi Jinping had warned him about the disease: "This is deadly stuff. 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." He added, "It goes through air, Bob. That's always tougher than the touch."

For months afterwards, however, Trump and other US officials publicly mouthed a pack of lies, also told by EU officials—comparing COVID-19 to the flu, insisting that fear of the virus is worse than the virus, and so on. Speaking of the virus, Trump told Woodward that he "always wanted to play it down" in order to avoid "panic," that is, a collapse of the financial markets.

The initial response of major European papers to revelations of this conspiracy at the summit of the American state has been as extraordinary as the report itself. Virtually all published superficial articles focused almost exclusively on the question of whether the report would harm Trump and benefit the Democratic Party in the November US presidential elections.

Germany's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* titled its article "Woodward's book on Trump is a gift for Biden." It wrote, "Trump has lied to the American people. At least that is how Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden sees it." After discussing Woodward's report, the SZ contradicted its own headline, concluding it was unclear whether it would benefit Biden: "What Woodward's revelations mean for Trump's re-election, we will find that out first in November."

France's *Le Monde* claimed that the world is "by now familiar" with the phenomenon of Trump struggling with embarrassing revelations. It concluded: "These extracts show that the president lied to his fellow citizens about the seriousness of the threat, and he is already frequently accused of having delayed taking measures he knew would strongly impact the economy."

None of these articles posed the obvious question: if these reports expose Trump as a liar, what does this say about EU officials who knew the same things and made similar statements as Trump?

Firstly, EU states were doubtless well aware of the tone of the intelligence briefings Trump received on COVID-19. Indeed, as EU states have pledged in recent years to spend hundreds of billions of euros on strengthening the NATO military alliance, they were intensifying the already close coordination of their intelligence agencies' reporting of common threats facing NATO.

Two months before the outbreak of COVID-19 last December, the NATO alliance published an article on its web site, titled "A new era for NATO intelligence." It announced a "broad series of reforms to improve the quality and utility of intelligence provided to NATO's most senior political and military leaders." It reported that the allied NATO powers "agreed that a common approach would improve intelligence sharing, coordinate production, enhance indications and warning, and improve management and governance."

As for Chinese officials, they were in close discussion with the EU on the pandemic. On February 13, almost a week after Trump told Woodward about discussing COVID-19 with Xi,

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Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi traveled to Berlin to meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel to discuss the virus. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Merkel "highly commended China's decisive and forceful response and tremendous efforts" and pledged to "support, help and work with China" on COVID-19.

It is not credible under these conditions to claim that top EU officials were unaware that US intelligence saw the pandemic as the major world threat in January and that Chinese officials had explained that COVID-19 was a deadly threat.

Yet not only did EU officials abstain from unmasking Trump's conspiracy, of which they were well aware, but they themselves repeatedly downplayed the virus. Like Trump, they sought to avoid taking measures that would affect the flow of profits to the banks and the financial aristocracy.

They constantly equated COVID-19 with milder illnesses that are not fatal for healthy adults or children. On January 23, German Health Minister Jens Spahn infamously compared COVID-19 to the flu: "That is also a risk we have every day." On February 24, eleven days after Merkel met Wang, Spahn again argued against establishing social distancing, this time comparing COVID-19 to the measles. Tagesschau cited him as saying: "Measles are clearly more contagious than COVID-19, but cities are not blockaded because of measles outbreaks."

On March 5, French government spokeswoman Sibeth Ndiaye declared, "We must remember that 80 percent of those infected [with COVID-19] only get a big cold, or at worst a big flu. … We are not going to stop the country."

That same day, as his government advocated a herd immunity strategy, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Britain could "take it on the chin, take it all in one go and allow the disease, as it were, to move through the population, without taking as many draconian measures."

Though EU governments apart from Britain and Sweden did not admit it so openly, the entire EU sought to implement the herd immunity policy. On March 11, Merkel called a press conference and baldly asserted: "A high percentage of the population, experts say 60 to 70 percent, will be infected." Given the EU's population of over 510 million, this meant accepting well over 300 million cases of COVID-19 in Europe.

The exposure of Trump's lies about COVID-19 shows that these EU officials were also misleading the public, while accepting in private a level of infections that would lead to millions of deaths.

They vindicate the warnings and the political work of the ICFI. Already, on February 28, the ICFI had issued a statement calling for "a globally coordinated emergency response to the coronavirus pandemic." It warned of the pandemic's vast potential scope and called for the allocation of hundreds of billions of dollars to fight the pandemic and help workers, immigrants and other people protect themselves from the virus.

Responding to the advocacy of herd immunity strategies by Johnson, Merkel, and others, the WSWS wrote: "What such statements reveal is not incompetence, but political criminality. Seventy-five years after the downfall of the Nazi Third Reich, a fascistic attitude towards the working class prevails in the financial aristocracy, mirroring that of Ancient Rome to its galley slaves: work until you die." In its reply to Merkel, it called for massive public spending, quarantines and the independent organization of the working class in workplaces in order to fight the virus.

Only the independent intervention of the working class, in a wave of spontaneous strikes centered in Italy that spread across Europe in March, compelled EU governments to adopt lockdowns. The EU relentlessly pressed for a return to work, however, voting trillions of euros in EU and European Central Bank bailouts to the banks and major corporations, which were explicitly approved by the major German and French trade unions. At the same time, they denied small businesses and workers appropriate funding to weather the economic impact of the lockdowns.

Studies by Imperial College London published in *Nature* have estimated that the lockdowns saved around 3 million lives in Europe. The fact that several million lives are at risk is underscored by a 17-page internal memo prepared on March 18 by the German Interior Ministry and later published on its web site. Titled "How we get COVID-19 under control," it asserts: "Most virologists, epidemiologists, doctors and political scientists, when asked what would happen if nothing is done, reply with a worst case scenario in which over 1 million die in 2020, in Germany alone."

As EU officials now force children back to school and their parents back to work, the European ruling class is again conspiring against the population. Governments across the EU have declared that there will be no more lockdowns, and Spanish officials have already blurted out that their back-to-school policy leads to "practically all children" being infected.

That is to say that, behind the backs of the people, the EU is conspiring to place the lives of millions at risk in order to fund bailouts and enrich the financial aristocracy. Workers across Europe must be warned: the ruling class and its political establishment are again preparing a massive social crime. It can only be fought on the basis of the independent, international mobilization of the working class, based on a revolutionary and socialist perspective.

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