

WHO condemns governments' failure to prepare for pandemic

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A report issued last week by the World Health Organization (WHO) makes clear that governments the world over were warned for years of the danger of a global pandemic with the exact characteristics of COVID-19 and did virtually nothing to prepare for or work to prevent such an outbreak.

The report was issued by the Global Preparedness Monitoring Board, an organization run jointly by the WHO and the World Bank to monitor international readiness to combat mass outbreaks of infectious diseases. It states at the outset: "Never before has the world been so clearly forewarned of the dangers of a devastating pandemic, nor previously had the knowledge, resources and technologies to deal with such a threat. Yet, never before has the world witnessed a pandemic of such widespread and destructive social and economic impact."

Such warnings were issued by the WHO itself. In last year's "A World At Risk" report, it made clear that the threat of a "rapidly spreading pandemic due to a lethal respiratory pathogen" had the potential to kill millions and cause economic devastation. The warnings were ignored by the United States and every other major power.

The consequence is a global catastrophe not seen since the world wars of the last century. By the end of this week, one million human lives will have been lost to the pandemic, a number expected to double by the start of 2021. Millions more will suffer longterm health problems caused by the disease. Hundreds of millions have already had their lives shattered by the loss of employment and the deaths of co-workers, neighbors, friends and family.

Not only were the WHO's warnings repeatedly ignored, the report notes that the pandemic "has demonstrated the fragility of highly interconnected economies and social systems, and the fragility of trust." The document continues: "It has exploited and exacerbated the fissures within societies and among nations. It has exploited

inequalities, reminding us in no uncertain terms that there is no health security without social security. COVID-19 has taken advantage of a world in disorder."

More accurately, the catastrophic impact of COVID-19 is the product of "a world in disorder." The report states that the pandemic "contributed to an increase in populism, nationalism and authoritarianism" in countries around the world. The pandemic also "fueled political confrontation" and "exacerbated vulnerabilities" bound up with unprecedented levels of social inequality.

In other words, the pandemic has exposed the contradiction between the highly integrated nature of modern society and the outmoded and irrational nation-state system of capitalism.

As a result, the necessary resources needed to combat pandemics were never made available. According to the data in the document, world governments would have had to spend an additional \$5 per person annually—a worldwide total of less than \$40 billion each year—to adequately prepare for a pandemic. As it is, the cost of the response to the pandemic thus far is \$11 trillion and counting. An additional \$10 trillion is expected to be lost "as a result of school closures and a global recession," which will be felt most heavily by the younger generation.

The report also lays out the deadly secondary effects of the pandemic. "Vaccination campaigns throughout the world have been suspended, threatening polio eradication and potentially leading to new outbreaks of preventable diseases, with their own related deaths, illnesses and long-term effects. Interrupted access to HIV, TB and malaria care threatens to cause more than a million additional deaths in 2020-2021 alone."

Similar projections estimate that an additional 1.2 million children and 56,700 mothers worldwide will likely die in the next six months because of disruptions in maternity care and food supplies.

And there is no end in sight. More than seven million

people have been infected in the United States alone and 204,000 have died. The number of new cases in Spain, France and the Netherlands, which had largely suppressed the pandemic during May, June and parts of July, has surged to levels at or above their highs in May or April. Even Italy, the world epicenter of the pandemic in early spring, is experiencing a resurgence of infections, with nearly 1,500 new cases reported each day. Cases and deaths in India, Brazil and Mexico continue to skyrocket.

The new eruption of the pandemic in Europe is directly related to the lifting of social distancing restrictions and reopening of nonessential industries and schools—as predicted and warned against by scientists and medical experts.

That so much death and suffering continues to occur, however, cannot be attributed simply to a lack of “good governance,” as the report implies. Every capitalist government is pursuing—implicitly and increasingly explicitly—a policy of “herd immunity,” i.e., deliberately allowing the virus to infect the population, regardless the cost in human lives.

The fact that this homicidal policy is common to all the major governments of the world gives the lie to attempts to attribute the criminal and incompetent response to the virus to the subjective traits of individual leaders such as Donald Trump. Trump and other fascistic leaders, such as Modi in India and Bolsonaro in Brazil, personify most openly the criminal character of the corporate-financial oligarchies that rule the world. Their coming to power expresses the descent of capitalism as a world system into barbarism and war.

The rational, humane and scientific policies, the financial resources, and the international coordination required to contain and eradicate the virus cut across the economic interests of the billionaires who dictate the policies of governments. From the outset, they have acted to protect and expand their stock portfolios, marshaling trillions of dollars in corporate bailouts, at the cost potentially of millions of lives.

“To overcome the health crisis, we must learn to live with the virus,” French President Emmanuel Macron tweeted last month. “It is likely that practically all children, one way or another, will be infected with coronavirus,” declared the regional premier of Madrid, Spain last Wednesday. This in a country that has seen its daily infections rise from 300 in June to 30,000 on Sunday.

President Donald Trump was most explicit when he said during a televised town hall event last week, “you’ll

develop herd mentality,” catching himself before saying “herd immunity.” He continued, “Like a herd mentality. It’s going to be—it’s going to be herd-developed, and that’s going to happen.” As a result, he said, the pandemic will “disappear.”

Even by the most conservative estimates, such a policy will ultimately lead in the coming years to more than 23 million deaths globally from COVID-19. More pessimistic projections warn that up to 71 million people will have to die for “herd immunity” to the coronavirus to develop in the world’s population. And this does not take into account reinfection, which has already been documented.

Every effort must be made to prevent such an apocalyptic scenario. Above all else, the deciding factor will be, as the World Health Organization states, “political leadership.” Not, however, the political leadership of capitalist governments, but rather the political leadership of the working class.

The working class must be clear that it is not a question of appealing to the governments and financial institutions that were warned and still allowed the pandemic to occur.

The catastrophic failure to contain the pandemic is the outcome of a social system that prioritizes private profit over human life. The \$40 billion a year needed to prevent a pandemic was deemed too expensive, even as military budgets and corporate bailouts soared all over the world.

Working people must demand the allocation of all the material and scientific resources needed to locate and stamp out the disease. This requires a struggle against the entire capitalist framework.

The growing opposition of workers to the deadly back-to-work drive, expressed in strikes and protests by teachers, autoworkers, bus drivers and many other sections of the working class internationally, must be transformed into a class conscious, independent political movement of workers of all countries, fighting to put an end to capitalism and establish socialism.



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