

As COVID-19 surges around the world, governments put profits ahead of lives

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9 November 2020

This weekend, the world hit 50 million reported cases of COVID-19 and deaths surpassed 1.25 million, as the Americas and Europe faced the worst stage of the pandemic to date.

In France and Italy, hospitals are once again overwhelmed, prompting them to transfer patients to nearby countries, including Germany. On Saturday, France logged a record 86,852 cases.

Photos and videos have circulated showing the hallways of Italian hospitals crammed with people on ventilators, with some even lying on hospital floors, as the country's health system is stretched to the brink. On Saturday, Italy's health ministry reported 39,811 new coronavirus infections over 24 hours, the country's highest daily tally. The total number of deaths related to the virus has reached over 41,000 in the country.

The United States logged record daily new cases on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, reaching over 132,000. The daily new case count in the US is now higher than the total number of COVID-19 cases in China during the entire pandemic.

The average number of daily new cases in America has surged by a staggering 30 percent over the past week. Nineteen states are reporting a record number of people hospitalized with COVID-19, and 43 states are reporting rising cases. This includes states in the country's rural heartland, where health care systems are chronically underfunded.

Texas now has more cases than any other state, with over one million. The Department of Defense sent three emergency medical teams to El Paso, and the city has set up temporary emergency medical facilities to buttress its inundated hospitals.

The US now has 10 million COVID-19 cases, or one fifth of the world's total, and nearly a quarter million

people are dead. Epidemiologists have warned that the death toll could rise to up to 400,000 by the end of the year.

Last March, governments were forced to temporarily close non-essential businesses after spontaneous walkouts by workers in auto plants and other facilities. But amid the latest wave of the pandemic, which is far worse, governments have made clear that they will not close schools or factories.

While France, Britain and Germany have implemented minor restrictions, including closing bars and gyms, they have not taken any measures to close schools or shut down production in non-essential manufacturing facilities.

In the United States, the Trump administration has openly embraced the doctrine of "herd immunity," which holds that the spread of the pandemic is a positive good and that governments should do nothing to stop it.

Opposition from the ruling class to the closure of schools and factories comes amid new evidence of the role of workplaces in spreading the disease. A recent report from the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that adults who tested positive for the coronavirus were twice as likely to work in an office or factory as compared to those who worked from home.

The victory of Joe Biden, the Democratic candidate in the US presidential election, was driven by broad popular opposition to Trump's disastrous handling of the pandemic. But Biden's first order of business was to reassure major corporations that there would be no fundamental change in course from the current administration.

On Saturday night, in his first speech since the television networks declared him the victor in the

election, Biden devoted only a single paragraph to the pandemic. He pledged to create an “action blueprint” to “turn around this pandemic,” without mentioning a single specific policy.

His transition team website does not call for the allocation of any additional funding to fight the pandemic. Its vague suggestions of “regular, reliable” testing and providing states with “the critical supplies they need” are indistinguishable from those of the outgoing Trump administration. While Biden called for a national mask mandate during the campaign, his website has dropped the demand, instead leaving such questions, as Trump did, to the governors.

Most importantly, the Democrats do not propose the closure of non-essential businesses, instead making vague statements like “Social distancing is not a light switch. It is a dial.” They likewise propose nothing to compensate workers and small businesses impacted by the pandemic, putting the burden of complying with recommended quarantine measures entirely on individuals and guaranteeing that workers will be forced by economic circumstances to work under conditions that are unsafe for themselves and others.

Millions of workers and young people who voted for Biden did so in the hope that he would carry out a coronavirus policy diametrically opposed to that of Trump. They are in for a rude awakening. A Biden presidency will be no less governed by the dictates of the major corporations, which see any effort to contain the pandemic as antithetical to their economic interests.

The pandemic is raging on both sides of the Atlantic because the response of governments is determined by the profit interests of the corporate and financial oligarchy, not by public health. The substitution of one capitalist ruling party for another cannot and will not fundamentally alter the direction of this policy.

Throughout the course of this year, the *World Socialist Web Site* has raised the alarm about the dangers posed by the pandemic, even as capitalist governments downplayed the threat and allowed the pandemic to spread. These warnings have been confirmed.

Containing the pandemic, the greatest health disaster in over a century, requires a radical social response.

Schools and non-essential workplaces must be shut down, and there must be a massive allocation of social resources to compensate workers for lost wages and to

ensure that children have the support they need for remote learning. Where production is essential to the functioning of society, safe working conditions must be overseen by workers' rank-and-file safety committees and health care professionals, with no concern for corporate profit.

There must be a massive investment in public health care infrastructure, including universal testing, contact tracing and free treatment for all. This requires a vast public works program to build up health care infrastructure and hospitals.

A massive, global public effort is required to develop and freely distribute a vaccine. This vital effort cannot be subordinated to corporate profit interests and nation-state competition.

The implementation of such a rational and scientific response to the pandemic is blocked by the private ownership of production and the subordination of all of society to the interests of the financial oligarchy. The struggle against the pandemic, in other words, is not fundamentally a medical issue. It requires a political struggle of the international working class against the capitalist system.



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