

Workers' lives are not expendable! Take action to stop the COVID-19 pandemic!

Marcus Day
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Ten months into the COVID-19 pandemic in the US, daily new cases are shattering previous records as the virus surges uncontrolled throughout factories, workplaces, schools and communities.

The scale of illness and death is staggering. On Wednesday, new cases again set a record, with over 144,000 reported, according to the COVID Tracking Project.

Over 1,400 died from COVID-19 yesterday, reaching a level last seen in early August, with deaths set to explode as hospitals begin to be overrun. In El Paso, Texas, the bodies have piled up to such a point that six mobile morgues have been established, and four more are being prepared.

By the end of the year, experts warn, close to half a million people could be dead as the death rate surges in line with caseloads.

The homicidal policies of the capitalist oligarchy, demanding the subordination of human life to the generation of profits, have led to a catastrophe. The disaster looming before millions of workers cannot be averted without emergency measures. Workers must demand the immediate shutdown of non-essential production, with full compensation for lost wages!

At every turn, the profit interests of the major corporations and banks are blocking the urgent measures necessary to bring the pandemic under control and save lives.

It is increasingly clear that industrial and other worksites are major vectors of virus transmission, despite the lying claims by corporate executives and trade union officials that effective safety protocols are in place.

Roughly one-third of Illinois' outbreaks since July 1 have been traced by the state to factories and workplaces. In additional data collected by the state but kept secret until leaked to the press, outbreaks were revealed to have taken place across a broad swath of corporate employers,

including automakers Ford and Fiat Chrysler; logistics and delivery giants Amazon, UPS and DHL; and meat and food producers JBS, Frito Lay, Smithfield and Tyson.

Across the state border from El Paso, meatpacking company Stampede Meat is suing the state of New Mexico in an effort to reopen, seeking to overturn the health department's order to close for two weeks despite a new outbreak of cases among workers in late October, with 100 workers already having tested positive at the plant throughout the year. In its lawsuit, the company is citing President Trump's April executive order stipulating that meat producers stay open under the Defense Production Act.

New research is demonstrating that offices and schools also pose significant risks of transmission. Employed adults who tested positive for COVID-19 were twice as likely to report regularly going to work at these locations than those who tested negative, according to a study released by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention last week.

An accurate, detailed and comprehensive picture of the pandemic's spread at workplaces is being blocked by the corporations, the trade unions, the corporate media and local, state and federal officials. The capitalists and their defenders all fear that if the full scope of the extent of the virus and the imminent threat of tens of thousands more deaths were made available to workers, they would overwhelmingly revolt and refuse to work, as happened in the wave of wildcat strikes that led to the shutdown of the auto industry and other non-essential businesses in March.

What information has come to light about the spread of the virus at auto factories explodes the lies by the companies and their accomplices in the United Auto Workers union that the plants are safe. Dozens and dozens of cases have been reported by workers in recent days at plants such as Fiat Chrysler's (FCA) Sterling Heights Assembly and Stamping Plants and the Jefferson North

Plant in the Detroit area, the FCA Tipton Transmission Plant and the Faurecia Gladstone auto parts plant in Indiana, in addition to large outbreaks earlier reported at General Motors' Wentzville, Missouri plant, Ford's Kentucky Truck Plant and many others.

If it were not for the independent efforts by workers, who have begun to organize rank-and-file safety committees in collaboration with the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party, little to no information would have emerged about the number of cases and the blatant disregard of safety by the companies and the unions.

In contrast to the spring, when outbreaks were centered in New York City and other major urban areas, the pandemic is now surging through virtually the entirety of the US, urban and rural alike. Forty-two states are in the "red zone" for new cases, according to the latest report by the White House's coronavirus task force, meaning they had a rate of over 100 people testing positive per 100,000 residents in the past week. "There is continued, accelerating community spread across the top half of the country," the task force wrote, with "the most diffuse spread experienced to date."

Even as there is no end in sight to the exponential rise in cases, hospitals and health systems are on the brink of being overwhelmed, facing widespread staffing and resource shortages.

Hospitalizations across the country reached a new peak yesterday at 65,368, with 3,404 more hospitalized patients than the day before. Some hospitals in the worst hit states in the Midwest, including the Dakotas, Wisconsin and Iowa, are already at capacity, and Illinois is set to run out of ICU beds by Thanksgiving. At the same time, a new explosion of cases is in the offing on the East Coast, with a 19 percent test positivity rate reported last week in Newark, New Jersey's largest city.

A vast social crime is being carried out by the corporations and the government, with workers being threatened with unemployment, homelessness and hunger if they do not continue laboring at non-essential factories and workplaces and exposing themselves to the deadly virus—all in order to ensure there is not a moment's let-up in profitmaking for the ruling class.

The Democrats and Republicans are in fundamental agreement that non-essential production must continue, and an incoming Biden administration, if it takes office, will be just as determined to keep business operating. The same underlying pro-corporate policy is being pursued in Europe, where governments of all political stripes have

ensured that industrial enterprises and schools remain open, resulting in a similar explosive growth in cases.

The result of these criminal policies is an utter catastrophe, which, as terrible as it is, is set to worsen to a degree that is almost unimaginable. The worst nightmares of infectious disease experts are being realized.

If action by the working class is not taken, hundreds of thousands of lives in the US alone will be threatened and countless more throughout the world.

To save themselves and their loved ones, workers must take matters into their own hands. Rank-and-file safety committees must be expanded and organized to prepare walkouts to shut down non-essential plants, warehouses and other workplaces. If governors and federal officials will not close the plants to protect lives, then workers must do it.

Rank-and-file committees must shut down non-essential workplaces and schools and demand full compensation and income security while the pandemic is brought under control. At essential workplaces such as food and medical supply producers, genuine safety measures must be implemented, overseen by workers' safety committees in consultation with public health and infectious disease experts. A massive redistribution of wealth must take place, with resources directed towards implementing universal testing, contact tracing, free treatment for all, and full social support for the unemployed.

The realization of such necessary life-saving measures requires the independent political mobilization of the working class in a struggle against the capitalist system, which subordinates all social needs, including life itself, to profit.



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