

Close all nonessential workplaces! Full compensation for workers and small businesses!

Andre Damon
14 November 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic in the United States is surging out of control.

The worst-case warnings of public health experts have come true. A quarter-million people are now dead. Over the past month, the number of daily new cases has tripled. On October 13, there were 51,000 new cases in the United States. On Friday, there were a staggering 182,000 new cases, up from 162,000 the day before.

In the country's manufacturing heartland, home to the factories that have become hotbeds of the disease, the situation is even more dire. In Michigan, the number of daily new cases has increased fivefold over the past month.

Throughout the country, hospitals are filling up and cities are bringing in refrigerated trucks to store bodies. The state of Illinois says that it is less than two weeks from running out of hospital capacity.

At the present rate, there will be a nationwide hospital bed shortage by next month. The availability of medical care is the biggest determinant of survival rates, and this scenario will be accompanied by death on a massive and unprecedented scale. According to the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, the death toll could hit 439,000 by March.

In response to this disaster, the world's leading public health experts have called for emergency lockdowns to stop the spread of the pandemic.

On Wednesday, Dr. Michael Osterholm called for a nationwide shutdown of nonessential production, with full compensation for lost wages. "We could pay for a package right now to cover all of the wages, lost wages for individual workers, for losses to small companies, to medium-sized companies or city, state, county governments," he said. "If we did that, then we could

lock down for four to six weeks."

Given that Osterholm sits on the incoming Biden administration's COVID-19 task force, markets immediately dropped in response to his remarks, amid fears on Wall Street that his comments signaled support for lockdowns on the part of the newly elected administration.

The response from the Biden campaign was categorical. Dr. Vivek Murthy, a spokesperson for the Biden campaign's COVID-19 Task Force, said, "We're not in a place where we're saying, 'Shut the whole country down.'"

In the face of condemnations from within the incoming administration, Osterholm himself made clear he was speaking only for himself. "Nobody's going to support it," he said. "It's not going to be supported out of the administration. It's not going to be supported in Congress."

The Biden campaign's rejection of a nationwide lockdown helped fuel a surge in the stock market, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average closing up by 400 points, within 200 points of an all-time record amid the surge in deaths and cases.

As for US President Donald Trump, he made clear there would be no lockdowns while he remains president. "I will not go to a lockdown," Trump said on Friday. "This administration will not go under any circumstances to a lockdown. The cure cannot be worse than the problem itself."

Osterholm's demand represents the consensus of all reputable and independent scientists in response to the pandemic. But his remarks have been greeted with universal condemnation from all sections of the political establishment.

In an editorial, the *Wall Street Journal* “the good doctor’s household remedy.” It declared, “Lockdowns don’t crush the virus. They merely delay its spread until the lockdowns end.”

What filthy liars! These are the same people who just days ago hailed the “Covid Vaccine Cavalry” that would lead to a “mid-2021 pandemic exit.” These sophists simultaneously declare that the pandemic will be over within months and that nothing can be done to save lives in the meantime.

The *New York Times* has been waging a furious campaign to demand that schools remain open. It published an editorial Wednesday titled “Keep Schools Open, New York.” To justify the demand that schools remain open, the *Times* published a news article asserting, “Research from around the world has also shown that elementary schools have seen only limited outbreaks.”

In reality, the *Times* has been the leading advocate for allowing COVID-19 to spread unchecked. In March, *Times* columnist Thomas Friedman coined the phrase, “The cure can’t be worse than the disease” to justify prematurely reopening businesses. This was the same phrase invoked by Trump Friday to declare that there will be no more lockdowns.

While millions of people voted against Trump in last week’s election in the hope that a Biden administration would repudiate Trump’s “herd immunity” policies and take urgent measures to stop the pandemic, no faction of the US political establishment supports even the most basic measures to contain the pandemic.

That is why it is necessary for workers to take emergency action. Factories and workplaces are becoming major hotbeds for transmission of the virus, with hundreds of cases tied to individual manufacturing and processing facilities. As the pandemic surges, the factories are becoming death traps.

Workers must establish rank-and-file committees to enforce the shutdown of nonessential production and to establish safe working conditions at essential facilities.

But the pandemic cannot be stopped on the level of individual plants. A nationwide shutdown, accompanied by a surge of social resources into health care, testing and contact tracing, is necessary to contain the pandemic. Only in this way can the virus be contained until the arrival of vaccines, and the lives of hundreds of thousands of people saved.

Such lockdowns are untenable unless they are accompanied by full compensation for lost wages for workers and earnings for small businesses. All working people economically affected by the pandemic must be made whole.

All those who counterpose lives and livelihoods are peddling falsehoods. This supposedly unavoidable trade-off exists only if one accepts beforehand the sanctity of the wealth of the financial oligarchy. In the midst of the greatest national emergency in a century, the vast wealth hoarded by the financial elite must be confiscated and put at the disposal of society.

All rent to corporate landlords and mortgage payments to major banks, together with payments on student loans and credit card debt, must be immediately suspended. All workers who have lost wages because they have helped educate and care for children studying at home must be compensated.

The shutdown of substantial portions of nonessential production in March saved countless lives by preventing hospitals from being inundated. But the ruling class did not take this measure of its own accord. It was terrified by mass walkouts at major manufacturing facilities throughout the Midwest, where workers took the initiative to shut down production.

The ruling class has made its position clear: Hundreds of thousands of lives are to be sacrificed for Wall Street before a vaccine arrives. Workers must not allow this mass murder! They must take a stand to defend their lives and those of their coworkers, friends and families.

The measures necessary to contain the pandemic are incompatible with the capitalist system. If a social order sets itself at war with the preservation of human life, then it is that social order, not human life, that must be sacrificed.



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