

Capitalism's winter of death

Immediate action is necessary to save hundreds of thousands of lives!

**Statement of the Socialist Equality Party
4 December 2020**

A tragedy of unprecedented proportions is unfolding in the United States. More than 13,000 people have died over the past week alone, including 2,918 yesterday, the highest daily death toll since the pandemic began. More than 218,000 people tested positive for the virus yesterday, another record.

A staggering 283,000 people have died in the United States. At yesterday's rate, 400,000 people will be dead by the end of this month, and more than 450,000 will be dead by the end of January. The milestone of half a million dead will be reached by the middle of February, without taking into account the expected surge in deaths. Centers for Disease Control Director Robert Redfield said this week that the coming months "are going to be the most difficult time in the public health history of this nation."

In an extraordinary statement, President-elect Joe Biden said Wednesday, "I don't want to scare anybody here, but understand the facts—we're likely to lose another 250,000 people dead between now and January."

Biden made this statement with the implication that these deaths are inevitable, as though it were a cosmic event that simply cannot be stopped. He made no proposal for urgent actions to prevent the deaths of a quarter-million people. Indeed, he followed his comment with the declaration: "We no longer have to shut down." These remarks echoed his statement from last month: "I'm not going to shut down the economy, period."

The president-elect knows full well that the vast majority of these deaths can be prevented by shutting down nonessential production and closing schools in the United States, with full compensation for lost wages. Dr. Michael Osterholm, the most eminent member of Biden's COVID-19 task force, urgently called for a nationwide shutdown last month, a position that was immediately repudiated by the Biden transition team.

Nearly a year into the pandemic, the effectiveness of public health measures is not in dispute. Every country that has closed businesses and schools has had a fall in cases and deaths. And every country that has eased restrictions has had an increase. Even now, if a national closure of nonessential production and schools was ordered, there is no doubt that it would save hundreds of thousands of lives.

Yet the entire US political establishment refuses to take the most basic measures necessary to contain the pandemic. Instead of closing businesses and schools, the remaining restrictions are being eliminated, and schools, as in New York City, are being reopened. Instead of providing financial assistance to workers, Congress refuses to provide even the most basic aid for the unemployed.

Trump is using his position as president to do whatever he can to develop his fascistic conspiracies, which have been centered on the demand for the removal of all restraints on the spread of the virus. The ongoing death toll is not even mentioned by the gangster in the White House. Biden, the incoming president and de facto head of the Democratic Party, has nothing fundamentally different to propose.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, all of government policy has been subordinated to the profit interests of the corporations and the wealth of the ruling class. Trillions have been handed out to Wall Street, with markets soaring to new heights every day as the rich feast on death and social misery.

The September 11 terror attacks, which killed 2,977 people, were used to launch wars costing some \$6 trillion and to implement sweeping attacks on democratic rights, all on the basis of a supposed national emergency. Now that the equivalent of a 9/11 is happening every day, death on such a massive scale is effectively treated by the US

political establishment as inevitable. And amidst the greatest social crisis since the Great Depression, there is supposedly nothing that can be done to alleviate mass impoverishment.

Emergency measures must be taken immediately! While the roll-out of vaccines is proceeding rapidly, there is no reason to believe that it will be handled any better than the way the ruling class has responded to the pandemic itself. Even in the best of circumstances, at the present rate hundreds of thousands of people will die before a vaccine is widely available.

The ruling class, represented by both the Democrats and Republicans, refuses to take the necessary actions. That is why the movement to stop the pandemic must be initiated by the working class—in neighborhoods, factories and workplaces. It is necessary for workers to take matters into their own hands.

The Socialist Equality Party advances the following demands:

- The immediate shutdown of all production at nonessential workplaces and schools. While public health experts have warned, correctly, that traveling during the pandemic poses massive risks, the fact is that America's factories and schools are just as dangerous as its airports. And yet the outbreaks at workplaces and schools are systematically covered up and ignored.

- The provision of a monthly income to all families, in an amount sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living until a return to work is possible. The provision of relief to small businesses, at an amount sufficient to maintain the economic viability of the enterprise and the wages and salaries of its employees until its operations can be resumed.

- The allocation of trillions of dollars to accelerate the production and distribution of vaccines free of charge and to expand the public health infrastructure, including for testing and contact tracing.

The claim that there is no money for such emergency measures is a lie. According to a recent study from the Institute of Policy Studies, a group of just 10 billionaires has increased its wealth by 42 percent since the start of the pandemic. The wealth of these oligarchs is generated by the workers who risk their lives every day in factories and warehouses.

All funds handed over to Wall Street and corporations

as part of the bipartisan CARES Act must be reclaimed, and a massive increase in taxes on the rich levied to meet urgent social need. All large financial and corporate institutions must be converted into democratically controlled public utilities, with their operations redirected to stop the pandemic.

With COVID-19 ripping through factories, it is urgently necessary for preparations for strikes and walkouts to begin now. The Socialist Equality Party has spearheaded the fight to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the corporate-controlled trade unions, to organize the necessary actions to save lives, including walkouts and strike action to shut down nonessential production. These committees must be expanded and developed in every workplace and factory.

The offensive by workers in the United States must be connected to struggles of workers in Latin America, Europe, Asia and throughout the world. The criminal policy of the ruling class in the United States is the most extreme expression of a policy that is being carried out in every country. The pandemic is a global crisis that requires a global response by the working class.

The interests and lives of hundreds of thousands of people cannot be secured through the existing political parties and institutional structures of the capitalist class. This requires the independent political mobilization of the working class in the fight against capitalism.

The capitalist order has set itself at war with society, demanding the sacrifice of another quarter-million lives for the enrichment of the capitalist class. This sacrifice is unacceptable, and it is capitalism that will have to go. The Socialist Equality Party is leading the fight to stop the pandemic and save countless lives by building a mass movement of the working class to take political power, expropriate the financial oligarchy and build a socialist society.

We call on all workers and young people to join the Socialist Equality Party and take up this fight.



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