

Stop the wave of death! Repudiate the policies of the pandemic profiteers!

Statement of the Socialist Equality Party (US)
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A wave of mass death is spreading throughout the world. While the coronavirus pandemic is once again devastating Europe and Latin America, the epicenter is in the United States.

Yesterday, the US total death toll surpassed 300,000, or nearly one out of every one thousand people. There were another 3,019 deaths and a record 246,000 new cases. Approximately 125 people are dying every hour, or more than two every minute. At least 17,000 people have died in the past week alone. These figures are expected to rise sharply in the coming weeks. The current case count is only beginning to reflect the surge due to Thanksgiving travel toward the end of November, and the death rate lags two weeks behind.

The situation is made vastly more dangerous as patients overflow hospitals, and the health care system begins to break down, forcing doctors and nurses to make the horrific decisions about who will be treated and who will not. At least 200 hospitals in the US were at full capacity last week, and one-third of all hospitals in the country have more than 90 percent of their ICU beds occupied.

The media focus in the US and Europe has been on the initial approval and distribution of a vaccine. However effective a vaccine, people will benefit from it only if they are alive to receive it. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Robert Redfield warned on Thursday that “for the next 60 to 90 days we’re going to have more deaths per day than we had at 9/11 or we had at Pearl Harbor,” and that a vaccine will have no real impact on the death toll for at least 60 days—and likely far longer.

Without an intervention of the working class now, the dying will continue at unprecedented levels. If deaths remain above 3,000 for 90 days, this means that another 270,000 people will be dead by early March.

The ruling class is responding with a staggering level of indifference. As the WSWs warned earlier this week, death on a scale unlike anything seen except in a major

war is being “normalized.” The pandemic is being treated, we wrote, “as if it were an unavoidable cosmic event, requiring no immediate action.”

The Trump administration, as it pursues its fascistic conspiracies, is continuing its policy of “herd immunity,” by which it means no measures will be taken to stop the spread of the virus. Whatever their tactical differences, the Democrats agree with this policy. They are proposing no emergency measures to halt and reverse the catastrophe. This week, Biden unveiled his coronavirus response “plan,” which includes nothing more than urging the population to wear masks, promises of vaccine production and a demand that the schools be reopened.

The media reports every day the scale of death without providing any indication of what must be done to stop it. Reference is made to the danger of travel and gatherings during the holiday season. Yet there is no reference to the role of factories and workplaces in spreading the virus, and deliberate lies are being spread about the supposed safety of opening schools.

The ruling class is attempting to blame workers for spreading the virus at home. However, the absence of systematic contact tracing is designed to cover up the spread at workplaces that remain open and unsafe. When cases do occur in factories or schools, information is suppressed by management, with the complicity of the trade unions.

When there is any challenge to the policy of the ruling class, the response is repression. This week, data scientist Rebekah Jones, who has worked to expose government lies about the spread of the pandemic in Florida, was targeted with a gestapo police raid ordered by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

As it is doing nothing to save lives, the ruling class is also taking no action to address the massive social disaster facing tens of millions of people. Four in ten households in the US report a lower income now than before the

pandemic. More than 4 million people have been unemployed for more than 27 weeks, and new unemployment claims surged to 850,000 this week. More than 12 million Americans were behind on their rent in November and face eviction as the national moratorium expires at the end of this month.

Congress has recessed until next week without any agreement on a “stimulus bill,” which, even if passed, will not meet the massive social need. The Democrats and Republicans are currently fighting largely over how much more money they will hand out to the corporations and the rich.

This catastrophe was not inevitable. While the virus is a product of nature, the response to it has been dictated by social and economic interests.

On March 17, when the US death toll was at only 121 and the virus was just beginning to spread, the Socialist Equality Party (US) outlined a “program of action for the working class,” including the emergency expansion of health care infrastructure and the immediate closure of all schools and nonessential workplaces, with full income for all workers affected.

If emergency measures had been implemented, hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved. The fact that in China, where the virus first emerged, total deaths have been under 5,000 and the virus has been virtually eradicated, demonstrates that this was possible.

The ruling class, however, rejected all measures that were incompatible with its interests. The Trump administration, aided and abetted by the Democratic Party, downplayed the threat and refused to take any action. At the same time, the pandemic was exploited to implement the largest transfer of wealth in world history. Trillions of dollars have been turned over to Wall Street, with the near-unanimous support of Congress.

Once this was done, the line from the political establishment and the media became: “The cure can’t be worse than the disease.” Businesses were reopened and restraints on economic activity were lifted throughout the country in April and May.

Public health has been sacrificed at the altar of the pandemic profiteers. The wealth of all billionaires in the US (651 people) has increased by more than \$1 trillion (or 36 percent) since the pandemic began, due largely to the surge in the stock markets. This increase in wealth alone would be enough to provide checks for \$3,000 for every adult and child in the country.

The refusal to implement a shutdown now has assumed an out-and-out criminal character. Among the tens of

thousands who will die in the coming weeks, many will have been infected as a result of the reopening of schools and workplaces.

Hundreds of thousands of lives can be saved if emergency action is taken now!

The Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate closure of all nonessential businesses and schools. Workers must be provided with an income sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of living until a return to work is possible. There must be real assistance to small businesses that face economic collapse.

All claims that nothing can be done to stop the virus are based on the position that all social life must be subordinated to the interests of Wall Street. The trillions of dollars hoarded by the pandemic profiteers, amassed through the looting of the public treasury, must be reclaimed to meet social need. The gigantic financial and corporate institutions must be converted into democratically controlled public utilities.

The SEP calls on all workers to organize safety committees and committees of action to take the necessary measures to save lives. Teachers, auto and other manufacturing workers, Amazon and logistics workers, students and young people should form these committees to organize common action. Workers have every right to refuse to work under these conditions. The health of workers must take precedence over the profits of the corporate and financial oligarchy!

These committees will forge ties between workers in the United States and workers throughout the world, who are facing the same conditions and have the same interests.

Above all, the fight against the pandemic is a political struggle against the ruling elite and the capitalist system. American capitalism is being comprehensively exposed. The ruling elite is revealed in all its incompetence, brutality and criminality. The unfolding catastrophe is demonstrating the necessity of putting an end to the capitalist system and replacing it with socialism.

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