

One year into the pandemic, 65,000 deaths in the US in one month

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One year after the first cases of COVID-19 were identified in China, December was the deadliest month of the pandemic both in the United States and throughout the world.

More than 65,000 Americans lost their lives to the virus over the past 28 days. At the present rate, deaths in December will be double what they were in November, when nearly 37,000 people died. The United States accounts for about a third of the global death toll of 175,000 over the past month.

By the end of this week, total deaths in the US will surpass 350,000, and the number of people who have tested positive for COVID-19 will reach 20 million. Another 193,000 people could die in this country over the next two months, according to predictions from the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation.

Experts have warned that even this scenario may be optimistic. "We very well might see a post-seasonal—in the sense of Christmas, New Year's—surge," said Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, on Sunday. "The projections are just nightmarish," Peter Hotez, an infectious disease specialist at the Baylor College of Medicine, told CNN.

In a warning to the rest of the world, the number of daily new cases hit an all-time record of 42,000 in the UK yesterday, driven by the emergence of a new strain of the disease that medical experts estimate is 56 percent more transmissible than the original.

US Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Brett Giroir said Monday that the new and more dangerous strain of the virus is "likely" already present in the United States. He was left to speculate because, unlike the UK, the US does not have a genetic surveillance system in place to ascertain the presence of

different strains of the disease.

Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to surge throughout the country. "California is now the only place (state or country) in the world" with more than 1,000 new COVID-19 cases per million people, noted physician Eric Topol.

Southern California, the state's most populous region, as well as San Joaquin Valley, in the state's center, have zero percent ICU bed capacity. On Sunday, Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center Chief Medical Officer Dr. Brad Spellberg said that the hospital faced a "massive crisis." Another hospital in the region has begun issuing guidelines for patients and families as to how the hospital will make decisions on who will live and who will die if care has to be rationed.

In the midst of this disaster, no section of the US political establishment is calling for emergency measures to contain the pandemic. Last week, President-elect Joe Biden warned that the "darkest days are ahead of us, not behind us." And yet he has rejected the demand by Dr. Michael Osterholm and other scientists for an emergency shutdown of nonessential production, declaring, "I am not going to shut down the economy, period."

Despite campaigning in opposition to Trump's handling of the pandemic, Biden has adopted Trump's signature policy demands: "open the schools" and "open the businesses."

This is despite the influx of scientific data proving the importance of closing schools and businesses in containing COVID-19. A study published this month in *Science* found that closing schools and universities reduces the spread of COVID-19 by 38 percent, and closing nonessential face-to-face businesses reduced transmission by 18 percent.

In the media, the scale of the catastrophe unfolding in the United States is less and less reported. A deliberate decision has been made to focus attention not on mass death and the overwhelming of the US health care system, but on the initial production and distribution of vaccines.

But as the federal government begins distributing vaccine doses to states, the US has inoculated just one-tenth of the number of people it had planned—just 2 million of the 20 million people health authorities said would be vaccinated by the end of the year. Images emerged yesterday of hundreds of elderly patients lining up for limited doses.

A report in *Kaiser Health News* called the US vaccine rollout a “mess,” noting that many states have not received close to the number they were promised. The publication wrote: “Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the US health-care system has shown that it is not built for a coordinated pandemic response (among many other things)... Why should vaccine distribution be any different?”

Even in the best of circumstances, the vaccine will not be broadly available until sometime in the spring or summer of next year. Moreover, scientists have warned that the emergence of the new, more infectious strain of the virus means that a higher percentage of the population will have to be vaccinated to stop community spread of the coronavirus.

The refusal of the entire political establishment to take the necessary measures to save lives is a continuation of its policy throughout the pandemic. No measures will be taken that contravene the interests of the financial oligarchy. To this end, governments around the world embraced the doctrine of “herd immunity”—calling for the mass infection of the population, with one White House official declaring, “We want them infected.”

This has led to the uncontrolled spread of the pandemic, with hundreds of thousands of fatalities, together with the greatest surge of hunger and unemployment since the Great Depression. On the other hand, this same policy has produced the massive enrichment of the financial oligarchy, whose wealth has soared as the US central bank pumped trillions of dollars into the financial markets.

And the markets continue their relentless rise. The Dow Jones Industrial Average increased 200 points to a

new record yesterday, leading to a further rise in the wealth of US billionaires. Over the past year, Jeff Bezos, the world’s richest man, has seen his fortune grow by \$77 billion, hitting \$192 billion on Monday. The wealth of Elon Musk, now the second richest man in the world, has surged from \$28.5 billion to \$160 billion.

Urgent measures must be taken to prevent mass death! But this requires that the working class intervene independently, in opposition to the pandemic profiteers and their political representatives.

The Socialist Equality Party demands the immediate closure of all nonessential businesses and schools. This must be accompanied by full compensation for lost wages and small business income, paid for through the expropriation of the vast sums hoarded by the rich. Trillions of dollars must be invested in health care infrastructure to treat, contain and eradicate COVID-19, and ensure that society is protected from the threat of infectious diseases in the future.

The Socialist Equality Party and our sister parties in the International Committee of the Fourth International have advanced these demands for nearly a year. If these measures had been implemented at the beginning of the pandemic, hundreds of thousands of lives would have been saved in the United States, Europe and around the world.

The SEP calls on all workers to organize emergency action committees to enforce emergency measures, including the shutdown of nonessential production. This struggle raises the question of who controls society, the capitalist class on the basis of profit, or the working class on the basis of social need.

The pandemic is demonstrating the basic reality that capitalism is at war with society. The working class must mobilize in a united struggle against this bankrupt and homicidal system.



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