

The pandemic and Trump's coup attempt

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On Wednesday, 4,100 people died from COVID-19 in the United States, the fifth day that the death toll surpassed 4,000. The number of daily new cases has surged to more than 200,000 every single day so far this year.

In the first two weeks of 2021, more than 43,000 people in the US have died from COVID-19, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) projects that as many as 90,000 more people could die in the next three weeks.

Globally, the death toll has surpassed two million. However, the official statistics give only a partial picture of the horrific reality, with one recent analysis showing that “excess deaths” around the world have been more than 30 percent higher than the official count of COVID-19 fatalities.

On top of this already disastrous level of mass death and infection, experts are now warning that new, more infectious variants of COVID-19 will lead to an even greater surge in deaths. An article in the medical journal *Stat* noted Thursday, “As horrific as the US Covid-19 outbreak looks right now, it is almost certainly about to get worse.”

The report continued, “They’ve raced through South Africa, the United Kingdom, and, increasingly, elsewhere, and now, new, more infectious variants of the coronavirus have gained toeholds in the United States. If they take off here — which, with their transmission advantages, they will, unless Americans rapidly put a brake on their spread — it will detonate something of a bomb in the already deep, deep hole the country must dig out of to end the crisis.”

This massive health care catastrophe is taking place simultaneously with the unprecedented political crisis in the United States following the January 6 fascistic insurrection incited by Donald Trump, and the ongoing threats of fascist violence throughout the country prior to and on Inauguration Day, January 20.

Amidst the endless coverage in the media on the events in Washington, however, there is no attempt to connect

the two. It is as if the effort by Trump to overthrow the Constitution bears no relationship to the central element of the administration’s policy over the past year: the insistence that no measures be taken to stop the spread of the virus.

It is a political fact that the main programmatic demand of the fascistic organizations cultivated by Trump over the past year has been the removal of all restrictions on economic activity to save lives. This was the demand of the rallies organized in April and May, in the aftermath of the bailout of Wall Street in late March. It was this that motivated the fascistic conspiracy in Michigan to kidnap and assassinate the state’s governor, Gretchen Whitmer, exposed in October.

In his first public remarks after the election in November, Trump doubled down on his administration’s response to the pandemic, while making a case to the ruling class that he should remain in power. As the death toll was rising, he insisted on November 16, “This administration will not be going to lockdown.” While “time will tell” who ends up in office on January 20, Trump repeated his earlier insistence that “the cure cannot be... worse than the problem itself.”

Emphasizing the central class interests motivating this homicidal policy, Trump pointed to the rise of the stock markets, noting that “it’s ready to break the all-time record.”

There is an essential connection between the policy of the ruling class in response to the pandemic and the breakdown of democracy in the United States. As the WSWS wrote in October:

The homicidal policy of the ruling class in response to the pandemic is at the center of the unprecedented political crisis in the United States. To implement this policy, the ruling elite is resorting to ever more violent and dictatorial forms of rule.

The reality of the pandemic also underlies the Democrats' response to the coup. Since the events of January 6, the Democrats, led by President-elect Joe Biden, are doing everything they can to cover up the extent of the conspiracy. Biden has insisted on the need for a "strong" Republican Party and has appealed to his "Republican colleagues"—that is, Trump's co-conspirators—for "bipartisanship," particularly in any legislative response to the pandemic.

As a party of Wall Street, the Democrats' greatest fear is the emergence of a movement of the working class against Trump's coup attempt that will develop into a conflict with the entire ruling class and the capitalist system. It is necessary to move on with the policy of the oligarchy, to "look forward, not backward."

One bank CEO quoted by *Politico* ("Wall Street's big wish: Please move on") summed up the attitude of the ruling class. Speaking of the fascist coup, he said: "I understand all the emotions around it and how strongly people feel about it. And I don't discount any of it. But I think Joe Biden's folks would agree with me on this, we have to get serious about moving forward right now."

"Moving forward" means continuing the policy of "herd immunity." Far from responding to the disastrous surge in COVID-19 deaths to press for measures to save lives, the entire US political establishment is demanding a further reopening of the economy, aimed at protecting the profits of major corporations at the expense of human lives.

Democratic Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot said Thursday she wants the city's bars and restaurants to reopen for indoor service "as soon as possible." On Wednesday, Whitmer herself announced the resumption of group fitness classes, reaffirming that the state is planning to reopen indoor dining in two weeks.

The most explicit argument for reopening businesses was provided by New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, another Democrat, who declared in his State of the State address, "We simply cannot stay closed until the vaccine hits critical mass. The cost is too high. We will have nothing left to open. We must reopen the economy."

Cuomo presides over a state that includes New York City, the most unequal place in the world, home to 113 billionaires.

Almost without exception, US billionaires are now far, far wealthier than they were a year ago. Topping the list is Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, who this week became the wealthiest man in the world, at \$201 billion. In the past year alone, Musk has made a shocking \$170

billion, even as close to 400,000 Americans died from the pandemic, and 10 million jobs were destroyed.

The claim that society cannot afford the cost of saving human lives, yet has \$170 billion to dole out to a single man in one year, is absurd.

Every aspect of the response to COVID-19 has been based on ensuring the availability of cheap labor in the midst of a raging pandemic, allowing the uninterrupted extraction of profits from the labor of the working class. This week, Brian Deese, Biden's incoming director of the National Economic Council, told a Reuters conference, "We need to get the schools open so that parents ... can get back to work."

In other words, the lives of teachers and students are to be sacrificed to maximize what the *New York Times*, commenting on the remarks, called "labor force participation."

In the midst of mass death and a general breakdown of democracy in the United States, it is noteworthy that the US markets surged throughout the entire week. In an article, "Why the Stock Market Doesn't Care About the Capitol Riot," the *Washington Post* cited one Wall Street trader as saying, "The market is agnostic about politics... We like to think democracy is better. But at the end of the day, investors don't seem to care so much about that."

The defense of democratic rights, just like the preservation of human life against COVID-19, cannot be entrusted to any faction of the ruling class. Containing the pandemic requires the intervention of the working class to demand the immediate closure of nonessential businesses and trillions of dollars for testing, contact tracing, safe quarantine areas and vaccination. We urge workers in every factory, workplace and neighborhood to build rank-and-file committees to fight for these demands and to join the Socialist Equality Party.



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