

The police crackdown in Miami Beach: Who is responsible for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic?

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Riot police cracked down on spring break partiers in Miami Beach, Florida on Saturday, just hours after the mayor declared a state of emergency and implemented an 8 p.m. curfew.

SWAT teams blocked the streets and deployed a deafening sound cannon while officers fired pepper balls into a crowd that had gathered along the city's famed South Beach. More than two dozen people were arrested, and police report more than 1,000 arrests since the beginning of the spring break season.

On Sunday, Miami Beach officials extended the curfew for up to three weeks, closing off access to the main tourist thoroughfare for four nights a week.

Gatherings such as those of young people in Florida are not safe and should be discouraged. The pandemic remains a dire threat, and new variants are spreading rapidly throughout the country. Florida already leads the country in the number of confirmed cases of the B.1.1.7 variant, which is more contagious and deadlier than earlier variants.

However, the response of the state is hypocritical in the extreme. First of all, the militarized crackdown on largely working class and African-American youth was not driven by public health concerns. Rather, police were deployed in response to complaints from wealthy residents that the crowds were blocking their access to the bars and beach front.

The extremely unsafe conditions in Florida, moreover, have been driven by the ruling class in the United States, which has removed all restrictions on the spread of the virus.

Thousands of college students and others have been welcomed to gather in Miami Beach and throughout the region as part of annual spring break festivities. Miami

tourism boosters used a \$5 million grant from local government to run its largest ad campaign in two decades. Airlines have been offering cheap fares to Miami for as low as \$50.

Hundreds of thousands of tourists have traveled to the state in recent weeks to gather in large crowds, from the 300,000 who attended Bike Week earlier this month up the coast in Daytona Beach to this week's revelry in Miami Beach.

Florida has no statewide mask mandate or social distancing restrictions on businesses, with Republican Governor Ron DeSantis pursuing a "business-friendly" pandemic policy that has resulted in more than two million COVID-19 infections and over 32,000 deaths in just one year.

An acolyte of former President Donald Trump, DeSantis has dismissed the seriousness of the pandemic from the beginning. He spearheaded the campaign against whistleblower Rebekah Jones, the scientist who created the state's tracking database and published her own database of infections in public schools, after she exposed efforts to manipulate data in order to reduce the official number of infections. Jones' home was raided in December and she faces a trumped-up charge related to an email that was sent to state employees.

This, however, is not just a matter of Florida. States across the country have begun eliminating most, if not all, pandemic restrictions, from Republican-controlled Texas, with Governor Greg Abbott declaring it time to "open Texas 100 percent," to Michigan, where Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer is increasing the number of fans allowed at baseball stadiums even as cases rise sharply in the state.

The lead is being given by President Joe Biden, who

is pushing for the full reopening of schools in his first 100 days in office. Earlier this month, Biden delivered his “Mission Accomplished” speech, calling on Americans to “mark our independence from this virus” with celebrations on the Fourth of July. Such proclamations spur passivity in the face of a deadly disease, as only 13 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated. Further, epidemiologists estimate—based on antibody and excess death studies—that only one third of Americans have been infected. This means that a wide avenue remains for the virus to spread.

Meanwhile, the unions have worked with the administration and local governments to reopen schools and keep factories running no matter how many workers, teachers and students get sick and die. Last week, American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten told a Texas teacher concerned about the dangers of reopening as the pandemic continues to rage: “We’re not going to fight to keep the schools closed.” Schools have been shown to be one of the leading sites for the transmission of COVID-19, and school closures are one of the most effective means for slowing its spread.

While the Democrats declare that they are “following the science” when it comes to the pandemic, the Biden administration is instead resorting to the distortion of science and outright lying to justify the reopening policy. Under Biden, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has thrown out its guidelines on social distancing, declaring that three feet of distance can be safe in schools, since six feet of distance made it impossible to pack students into classrooms.

From the beginning of the pandemic, there has been no social response from the ruling elite to protect public health and deal with its impact on the youth, workers and small businesses. Factories, slaughterhouses and other large workplaces have been kept open and owners have been allowed to cover up major outbreaks, even as workers fell ill and died. Young workers, who predominate in low-wage service industries, have been kept on the job without serious protections or thrown out of work by the millions without any economic assistance.

The whole situation has been presented as a matter of personal responsibility: wash your hands, stay home if you can and social distance. The message is: “If you

get sick, it’s your fault.” There have been no systematic efforts to educate the public about the pandemic.

No social programs or initiatives have been established to deal with the many consequences of the pandemic, including the growth of social isolation and mental health issues, which have fallen heavily on young people at a time when they seek social interaction and companionship.

As a result of the murderous policy pursued by the ruling class in the United States, more than 550,000 people have died. In the last month, with the increasing availability of vaccines, the media treats the continued death toll—more than 1,000 a day—as a minor issue, promoting the narrative that, more or less, the crisis is over.

The disoriented response among a section of youth is the product of a complete absence of political perspective. Everywhere they turn, they have been subjected to not just mixed messages, but falsifications and outright lies. Calls for social distancing and lockdowns have been combined with reckless reopenings and the disparagement of restrictions. As it drags on into its second year, the pandemic appears to be a crisis without end, encouraging a nihilistic outlook.

Given leadership and political perspective, a rebellion among the youth will acquire a progressive direction.

Young people and workers must demand a socially progressive response to stamp out COVID-19 under conditions in which the pandemic is once again expanding in the US and globally.

Schools and non-essential workplaces must be closed, with full financial support, until a sufficient share of the world’s population has been vaccinated and the virus is suppressed. The ruling class has proven that it has no interest in taking such serious measures. They can be implemented only through the fight of the working class against the capitalist system—which subordinates the interests of humanity to private profit—and for the socialist reorganization of society.



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