

Three million dead from the coronavirus pandemic

Bryan Dyne
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The world has passed another grim milestone: 3 million dead from the coronavirus pandemic. This staggering loss of life, after little more than a year, is a devastating indictment of the ruling elites of every major country and of the capitalist system as a whole.

And even as this latest barrier is surpassed, the pandemic is accelerating and is poised to produce even more deaths in the months to come.

Globally, the average number of daily confirmed cases is at the highest rate during the entire pandemic. It has more than doubled from a low in mid-February of 361,000 to more than 752,000. During that same period, more than 520,000 men, women and children died, and the official count of daily deaths, at nearly 12,000, is climbing toward the peak seen this past January of just over 14,000.

The pandemic has accelerated with extraordinary rapidity in countries such as Brazil and India. In Brazil, the daily cases have increased by about 50 percent to more than 65,000. The real toll, however, can be seen in the daily death counts, which have nearly tripled since February to almost 3,000 per day, the highest rate in the country since the pandemic began and second only to this past winter in the United States, when daily deaths at times reached nearly 3,500.

In India, the situation is even more dire. In the past two months, the number of daily cases has rocketed from a low of 11,000 to more than 200,000, an 18-fold increase. Correspondingly, the number of active cases has grown from 138,000 to more than 1.8 million, and the daily death rate has shot up from less than 100 to more than 1,100. India currently has the highest number of confirmed new cases each day and is well on its way to surpassing the records set by the United States.

Such dramatic explosions of the virus are not just confined to nations that have already had previous waves of the pandemic. In Papua New Guinea, where public officials had been able to limit the total number of infections to just 900 since the pandemic began, there has been a tenfold increase in the number of known coronavirus cases over the past two

months, with total cases now more than 9,500. Deaths have similarly spiked from less than 10, out of a population of 9 million, to nearly 90.

Countries in Eastern Europe have also faced new waves of the contagion. Daily new cases in Bulgaria spiked sharply in February, reaching a height of more than 3,600 new cases a day in March, with more than 110 new deaths every day. In Hungary, the daily case count only recently dropped below 5,000, and the death rate is still at more than 250, triple what it was two and a half months ago.

The official number of coronavirus deaths in Germany reached 80,000 yesterday, and many more will die in the coming days because of the refusal by the government to close schools and factories despite a massive third wave of the virus. There are currently around 30,000 new infections every day, and the health care system is overwhelmed.

Among German workers, there is a growing sense that the federal and state governments bear full responsibility for the catastrophe. Many workers and youth reacted with protests and scorn at yesterday's official state event to commemorate the dead and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier's proposal to put up a candle in every window.

Instead, many people put up candles in front of government buildings all over the country. Protesters accused the state and federal governments of carrying out a de facto policy of social murder in the interests of the corporations and the banks. "Each candle stands for people who, because of your hesitation and your policies, are no longer alive," one poster read. Another stated: "You do everything to protect profits, dividends and gains. Shame on you."

The accelerating spread of the virus is compounded by the spread of new and more infectious variants of the virus, which have been allowed to mutate innumerable times throughout the now nearly 142 million officially recorded coronavirus infections. In India, a variant that is a combination of one that originated in South Africa and the US West Coast is spreading ferociously, along with the UK variant. In Brazil, the P.1. variant is suspected to be the

reason behind the high death rate. In both countries, underfunded hospital systems, unable to provide the necessary care for the new influx of hundreds of thousands of patients, are on the brink of collapse.

In the face of the accelerating pandemic, governments throughout the world are rejecting the necessary measures to contain the spread of the disease. An editorial in the *Times of India*, articulating the position of the ruling class, proclaimed that any lockdown measures would be “a cure truly worse than the disease.” One of the heirs of the Ambani family, one of the richest in Asia, called lockdowns “totalitarian” and claimed that they would “destroy the very backbone of our society and economy.”

Such is the language of the ruling elite in every country. When they speak of “society” and the “economy,” they mean the interests of the rich. They are not concerned with the colossal loss of human life that has already occurred, and the even greater number of deaths to come, but with ensuring that the accumulation of their private profit continues unabated. The tens of trillions handed out by every government to bail out the banks must be paid for with the lives of the working class.

Moreover, the panacea that coronavirus vaccines were promised to be at the beginning of the year has proven to be a lie. The vaccine distribution globally has been extraordinarily unequal, with Reuters estimating that 55 percent of those who have received at least one dose of the vaccine are from high income countries. And within those countries, various local reports make clear that the richest individuals are much more likely to have been vaccinated than the poor.

In addition, countries have taken to hoarding vaccines, as well as the raw materials to make vaccines. The worst culprit is the US, now under the administration of Joe Biden. A study by Duke University estimates the US will have more than 300 million excess doses of the vaccine by July, even when accounting for vaccines set aside for children, none of which the Biden administration is currently offering to other countries for their vaccination programs.

The Duke study also notes that, “even if COVAX, the global COVID-19 vaccine mechanism, were to be fully funded this year, it would still vaccinate only 20-25 [percent] of the population of the world’s 92 poorest countries. At the current rate, these countries may not reach 60 [percent] coverage until 2023 or later.”

There have also been calls for the Biden administration to lift the embargo on the raw materials to make the vaccine so that more vaccines can be made in other countries. According to the South Asian news source IANS, India’s China expert Brahma Chellaney lambasted this policy, “As if Biden’s vaccine hoarding policy during a global crisis

wasn’t bad enough, he also has restricted export of key raw materials, affecting vaccine production in India.”

Only about 1 percent of India’s population has been fully vaccinated, and less than 0.1 percent have been given even one dose in Papua New Guinea. Countries ravaged by decades of US military interventions, such as Honduras and Guatemala, have vaccinated less than a percent of their population, and Mexico and Brazil have only been able to vaccinate 8.6 percent and 11.7 percent of their respective populations.

From the beginning of the pandemic, a rational and scientific response has been blocked by two interrelated factors: the prioritization of personal wealth over social need and the subordination of the necessary global response to national geopolitics.

Ample resources exist to both produce enough vaccines for the nearly 8 billion members of the human race, as well as to distribute them in a timely manner. There is also more than enough money to close schools and nonessential businesses, which are necessary measures to stop the transmission of the coronavirus, and to provide compensation for all the workers and small business owners who would lose their income during such lockdowns.

The working class must take the resolution of the pandemic into its own hands. The emerging strikes across the US and internationally must be coordinated among all sections of workers in every country. The working class must intervene to enforce a policy that places human life above private profit. That is, the fight against the pandemic must be developed as a political struggle against the entire capitalist order, which has killed millions and caused untold suffering for billions.



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