Capitalism prepares to fight wars, not the pandemic

Andre Damon
27 April 2021

Last year, as the COVID-19 pandemic spread from country to country, working people responded to each new outbreak of the disease, first in China, then Italy, then America, with sympathy and expressions of solidarity.

Workers around the world cheered the doctors of Wuhan and the nurses of Bergamo. Doctors corresponded with their international colleagues, sharing the latest knowledge and tips to save the lives of patients entrusted to them. And scientists closely collaborated across national borders to ascertain the origins of the disease, sequence its genome, and aid the development of vaccines.

But the world's governments had other ideas. Last year, as more than 3 million people lost their lives amid a raging pandemic, governments around the world spent a record sum, nearly $2 trillion, on weapons and preparations for war.

Even though global economic output declined by 4.4 percent—the greatest economic collapse since World War II—military spending around the world surged by 2.6 percent.

The United States, the global leader in deaths from the COVID-19 pandemic, with 587,000 and counting, is also by far the world's greatest military spender. The US increased its arms spending by 4.4 percent last year, to $870 billion, more than the next 10 countries combined.

The US military is throwing around money with reckless abandon. Every branch of Washington's bloated nuclear weapons program, from intercontinental ballistic missiles, to supersonic stealth bombers and nuclear missile submarines, is being rebuilt and expanded from the ground up. Perhaps most dangerously of all, the United States intends to double military spending in the Asia-Pacific region, using the money to ring the Chinese coastline with land-based ballistic missiles stationed in Japan, Taiwan and the Philippines.

The US government's spending on the military massively dwarfed all emergency federal spending on health care and vaccinations since the start of the pandemic. The CARES Act, passed in March of 2020, included only a few tens of billions of dollars in emergency health care spending, while the American Rescue Plan passed under current President Joe Biden was just one-eighth the annual US military budget for spending on emergency health care measures.

All the world's imperialist countries are massively expanding their military spending. Leading the pack is Germany, whose aggressive quest for world domination helped trigger two world wars. Germany's military spending increased by 5 percent last year and is up by nearly a third over the past decade.

France and Britain each increased their spending by 2.9 percent, significantly more than the global average.

The governments of the United States, France, Germany and the UK have all rejected the closure of non-essential businesses to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, arguing that society cannot afford these critical life-saving measures.

French President Emmanuel Macron declared that the population would have to "learn to live with" the virus. UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson, in rejecting lockdowns, insisted that the alternative was better: to "let the bodies pile up in their thousands." In the United States, claiming that mass infection would lead to a faster economic recovery, Trump administration officials declared, "We want them infected."

But while claiming that containing the pandemic is too expensive, capitalist governments all over the world found $2 trillion for their armed forces and arms

© World Socialist Web Site

manufacturers.

The fight against the pandemic is by its very nature a global struggle. In its statement for the International Online May Day Rally, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) explained:

The emergence of new variants where the pandemic is spreading, potentially resistant to vaccines, demonstrates that the pandemic cannot be eradicated in any single country unless it is eradicated globally. National competition between the capitalist powers has blocked a globally coordinated response to the pandemic. Now the life-saving vaccine is being hoarded by the dominant capitalist countries and used as an instrument in their geopolitical intrigues.

The COVID-19 pandemic has triggered a ferocious eruption of nationalism, xenophobia, and militarism by capitalist governments and ruling elites around the world.

Former US President Donald Trump called the COVID-19 pandemic the “Chinese virus” and “Kung flu.” The Biden administration is continuing Trump’s efforts to demonize China, falsely claiming that Beijing is responsible for a cover-up and implying that the disease was a biological weapon created in a laboratory. As a result of these efforts to demonize China, racially motivated violent attacks against Asian Americans have surged over the past year.

The massive and record financing of the means of destruction and death, when what is necessary is a globally coordinated emergency program to save lives, exemplifies the historically outmoded and bankrupt character of the entire capitalist order.

In its criminal indifference to human life, in its efforts to desensitize the population to mass death from the pandemic, the ruling elites are at the same time seeking to prepare the population for the horrific consequences of world war.

All over the world, however, a different axis for politics and social organization is emerging. Workers are engaged in a wave of strikes and struggles in opposition to the subordination of all social and economic life to the enrichment of the capitalist oligarchy.

To unify these struggles and develop a counteroffensive against the homicidal policies of governments controlled by the capitalist ruling elites, the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) statement called for the formation of an International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. The IWA-RFC will fight to unify workers throughout the world against all efforts to pit worker against worker, nation against nation.

The development of a powerful counteroffensive must be connected to the building of a socialist leadership in the working class. The fight against militarist violence, as with the fight against the pandemic, is at the same time a fight against the capitalist system and the oligarchy it serves. We urge all of our readers to join this effort and register to attend the International May Day Rally today.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site