On US Memorial Day: American ruling class declares pandemic “over,” as 500 die every day

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Memorial Day in the United States is supposedly devoted to the remembrance of those killed in American wars—all, for more than a century, imperialist wars instigated by the American capitalist elite.

The patriotic speeches are invariably filled with hypocrisy, since those who died in these wars are generally drawn from the working class, while the benefits accrued entirely to the ruling class. The purpose of this exercise is the ideological preparation for the next wars, as indicated by President Biden, who combined maudlin tributes to those who died in uniform with threats against China and Russia.

But Memorial Day 2021 had an additional and equally sinister purpose. It was an effort at promoting mass amnesia about COVID-19, encouraging the population to forget about the coronavirus pandemic—the 600,000 or more dead, the 500 dying every day, the 100,000 new cases a month—in favor of a round of celebrations and spectacles that will themselves worsen the pandemic, creating super-spreader events that could potentially infect tens if not hundreds of thousands more.

“America is roaring back,” declared NBC on the opening segment of its nightly news on Sunday. “This Memorial Day, feeling familiar and offering a splash of normal,” the broadcast added. “It was a holiday weekend the nation needed and a reminder that there is an end in sight.” Similar fatuous propaganda could be found on every network and in every major newspaper.

Corporate and government officials sang from the same playbook. The Republican governor of Massachusetts, Charlie Baker, who rescinded state-mandated COVID-19 restrictions on Friday, said it most succinctly: “Unless something very odd happens, I would say that it is pretty much over.” Some 707,000 people have contracted coronavirus in Massachusetts, one in every ten, and 18,000 have died. Without masks or social distancing, and with nearly half the state’s population still unvaccinated, thousands more will die.

The CEO of Frontier Airlines, Barry Biffle, exulted, “The surge in travel is just now starting to happen. Memorial Day is going to be big; the fourth of July is going to be crazy.” Social distancing in air travel is no longer possible due to crowd sizes, with more than six million people passing through airports this weekend, the most for such a period this year. Airports are at 90 percent capacity, and airline workers are being systematically bullied by passengers who threaten them if they try to enforce the few remaining COVID safety requirements.

The media is enthusiastically spewing out statistics about the millions celebrating the holiday, taking to the skies, or traveling to vacation spots. The beaches are packed again, movie theaters are reopening and pundits predict a “record-breaking weekend at the box office.” Indoor dining at near or full capacity is becoming commonplace. Bars and nightclubs are back in full swing. Restrictions on stadium seating and occupancies are being lifted.

The Indy 500 car race, the largest sporting event of the pandemic, saw more than 135,000 fans descend on the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, with mask requirements only intermittently observed. With the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) giving its official seal of approval for the lifting of mask mandates for those fully vaccinated, the reliance on an “honor” system means no one can tell who is vaccinated and who is not.

The lifting of mask mandates and social distancing restrictions by the CDC on May 13 was forcefully condemned by leading US and international epidemiologists, who warned of the dangers posed by these policies. “It’s such a mess,” said Dr. Eric Feigl-

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Ding of the COVID Action Group. “It is horrible to rely on an honor system. That is inherently the problem!”

Dr. Yaneer Bar-Yam of EndCoronavirus.org said, “It’s awful. Our network and many others are angry.” Dr. Jose-Luis Jimenez, an aerosol physicist from the University of Colorado, noted, “The CDC lifted the mask mandate too early, with too few people vaccinated and variants like the Indian one starting to propagate in the US.”

Memorial Day is officially the day for remembering those that have died in wars. But more Americans have died of coronavirus in the past year than in all the US wars of the 20th and 21st centuries. While the official US death toll is now at 610,000, estimates place the actual toll closer to one million. At the current pace of 500 a day, 112,000 more deaths can be expected in 2021. And this assumes that will not be further surges in infection and deaths as the public health precautions are abandoned—as is currently happening in the UK.

Biden has portrayed the rollout of vaccination in the United States as a public health miracle, while implicitly blaming his predecessor for the massive death toll. He never acknowledges the likelihood that sometime later this year, particularly if there is a fall or winter surge, COVID-19 will have killed more Americans under his administration than under that of Donald Trump.

Globally, more than 10,000 are dying each day worldwide, mainly in regions where a small fraction of the population have received the vaccine because of the hoarding taking place among high-income nations pursuing the policy of vaccine nationalism. Though the official global estimate indicates there have been 3.5 million deaths, new studies place the excess death toll at over ten million.

One breach in the official silence on the true extent and significance of the toll on the working class is the recent unfolding of a mural to the firefighters and frontline workers who died in the pandemic in Detroit, Michigan.

Firefighter Captain Franklin Williams was honored as the first Detroit firefighter to die from COVID-19. Erick Jones, Detroit Fire Commissioner, said at the unveiling on Sunday, “This mural will stand as a permanent reminder of a man who stayed on the front lines to fight an invisible enemy… Some of them became ill, some of them were hospitalized, and Franklin made the ultimate sacrifice.”

More than 3,600 health care workers perished in the first year of the COVID pandemic in the United States. Amnesty International (AI) placed the global estimate of health care workers who died from COVID-19 last year at over 17,000. Steve Cockburn, the head of economic and social justice at AI, stated, “This is certainly a significant underestimate because there is a degree of under-reporting on a lot of countries.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said during his opening remarks at the 74th World Health Assembly last week, “Almost 18 months into the defining health crisis of our age, the world remains in a very dangerous situation. As of today, more cases have been reported so far this year than in the whole of 2020. On current trends, the number of deaths will overtake last year’s total within the next three weeks … globally we remain in a fragile situation.”

The official celebrations of a bogus “return to normalcy” in the United States are based above all on the narrowest form of parochialism: viewing a global pandemic, where new variants sweep from continent to continent in a matter of days, through the prism of nationalism. The truth is, there can be no return to normal in any country so long as the coronavirus has free rein to infect, kill and mutate in a population of billions around the world.

The real purpose of this campaign is to wear down popular resistance to sending children back to unsafe schools and sending workers back to unsafe workplaces, so that the capitalist ruling class can reap the greatest possible profits from the exploitation of labor. It is not a matter of the health of the working people, but of the financial health of the super-rich.

Workers in the US must demand measures to stop the spread of the virus, both within the United States and globally. They and their class brothers and sisters in every nation face the same threat posed by their governments, who speak for the financial oligarchs when they place the need to accumulate profit over workers’ lives.

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