The Economist: “Excess deaths” during pandemic exceed 15 million

Benjamin Mateus
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Fifteen million more people have died during the COVID-19 pandemic compared to historical norms, according to a recent report by the *Economist*. This figure is more than three times the reported COVID-19 deaths, which stands at 4.6 million people.

“Many people who die while infected with SARS-CoV-2 are never tested for it, and do not enter the official totals,” the editors write. “Conversely, some people whose deaths have been attributed to COVID-19 had other ailments that might have ended their lives on a similar timeframe anyway. And what about people who died of preventable causes during the pandemic because hospitals full of COVID-19 patients could not treat them? If such cases count, they must be offset by deaths that did not occur but would have in normal times, such as those caused by flu or air pollution.”

The capitalist nations were warned repeatedly by scores of national and international public health agencies that such an event was more than certain. Every means was within their capacity to employ all resources to have checked the spread of the infection in its initial phase and brought the pandemic to an abrupt end.

Instead, the financial oligarchy have squandered every opportunity to end the suffering of billions of people by further enriching themselves through massive transfers of wealth only to force workers back to workplaces. This policy has given free rein to the virus to not only spread into every corner of the planet, but to constantly mutate into more virulent forms. It has been the policy of herd immunity that has culled such a massive number of people under the false auspices of “the cure can’t be worse than the disease.” In fact, as the *Economist* report indicates, the disease has taken a horrific toll on the international working class, orphaning and impoverishing untold millions.

As the *Economist* report states, the wide range in figures stems from the complex nature of ascertaining data from national and subnational levels. Delays in reporting deaths, specifically confirming COVID-19 and COVID-related deaths and attributing the cause of death, make the statistics imprecise but offer an appropriate ball-park figure. Among the globe’s 156 countries with one million or more people, the *Economist* only managed to obtain data on total mortality from 84. Among these, some have only reported these figures once to their national registries.

As the table above indicates, the estimate of excess deaths in regions like Asia and Africa are 700 to 800 percent over official COVID-19 deaths. This stems from the implementation of herd immunity policies while lacking the resources to care for the infected. Additionally, lack of reliable reporting of COVID-19 cases and delays or the omission of tracking of those that have died has led to this stark disparity in figures.

The impact of the pandemic on India has been, by far, most calamitous. The surge of the Delta variant in the spring across the country accounts for a significant number of excess global deaths over the last five months. Although there had been only 171,000 COVID-19 deaths reported in mid-April, the excess deaths at the time were ten times higher, at 1.6 million. Since then, even though only 270,000 additional COVID-19 deaths have been reported, the excess deaths have climbed 2.7 million, reaching 4.3 million.

Additionally, countries like Indonesia had very deadly forays by the virus, seeing the reported COVID-19 death toll surge as health care systems became inundated in a matter of days. With supposedly 135,500 COVID-19 deaths, the excess deaths stand at 500 percent higher, with 800,000 estimated deaths.

South Africa has been pummeled by repeated waves

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of infections. After having faced the Beta variant of the coronavirus, they are now dealing with another strain designated as C.1.2, which is demonstrating an unusually high number of mutations and mutation rate. Though the officially-reported number of COVID-19 deaths is over 80,000, there have been close to a quarter-million excess deaths, a figure three times higher. However, the excess deaths compared to COVID-19 deaths across many nations in Africa indicate a severe undercounting. Excess deaths in Nigeria are 6,400 percent higher. In Ethiopia, it is 3,500 percent. Egypt's is 1,400 percent, and in the Congo, a little more than 1,000 COVID deaths have been reported. However, the excess deaths are above 130,000, or more than 12,000 percent. Despite reports of Africa being spared during the pandemic, this critical analysis suggests otherwise.

Even in regions like Europe and the US with more robust reporting systems and detailed documentation of death certificates, because of the social crisis and ensuing chaos created with overburdened health systems during repeated waves of infection, excess death estimates are far above official COVID-19 deaths reported.

By the end of July, excess deaths in the United States had plummeted even below their historical norms, and cases of COVID-19 and deaths had approached lows not seen since March 2020, when the pandemic first surged across the country.

But as the US state and federal governments implemented a bipartisan policy of reopening schools, COVID-19 cases have rapidly climbed, with COVID-19 deaths having most recently exceeded the seven-day average of over 1,500 per day. Excess deaths, too, have catapulted, reaching 3,000 per day. That means that excess deaths are now twice those of the official COVID-19 death tolls. In all, the cumulative COVID-19 deaths, according to their tracker, currently have reached close to 650,000, and excess deaths are 820,000, or 30 percent higher.

It is staggering to conceive that when in July the country could have heeded the warnings made by epidemiologists about the deadliness of the Delta variant and imposed a comprehensive elimination strategy to prevent any further COVID-19 related illnesses, instead, in one short month it is facing, perhaps, its worst ordeal with the virus.

In summing up their analysis, the *Economist* report states, "Measured by excess deaths as a share of the population, many of the world's hardest-hit countries are in Latin America. Although Russia's official death tally suggests that it has protected its citizens tolerably well, its numbers on total mortality imply that it has in fact been hit quite hard by COVID-19. Similarly, we estimate that India's death toll is actually in the millions rather than the hundreds of thousands. At the other end of the table, a handful of countries have actually had fewer people die during the pandemic than in previous years."

Even as the pandemic surges to new heights, capitalist governments have no intention to raise a single finger to bring this pandemic to an end. The present course they have set the world on will also see new and more deadly strains of the coronavirus emerge that will perpetuate the pandemic, leading to untold millions more deaths. Avoiding this catastrophe requires a political intervention by the working class, armed with the demand for the complete and total eradication of COVID-19.

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