

Three years and 21 million dead from the COVID-19 pandemic

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Three years ago today, on March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) formally declared COVID-19 a pandemic. At the time, there were about 120,000 reported cases and less than 5,000 deaths worldwide.

The official death toll of the pandemic now stands at 6.9 million, but the best estimate of the true amount of men, women and children that have died is at least 21 million, three times official figures. That is, more than 21 million people would be alive today if the pandemic had been contained when it first emerged in early 2020.

For context, in three years, the coronavirus pandemic has killed more people than all the casualties of World War I. In the United States alone, there are 1.1 million official deaths and an additional 300,000 excess deaths, including at least 1,705 children. The overall per capita death rate is steadily approaching that of the 1918 flu pandemic.

In addition to those who have died, tens of millions continue to suffer from a vast array of symptoms that have been grouped under the name Long COVID. Just last week, a study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that those with Long COVID are at high risk of “cardiovascular events and excess all-cause mortality.”

In a rational, scientifically organized society, humanity would currently be celebrating the beginning of the end of the disease three years ago. The WHO’s declaration would have been part of a worldwide mobilization to test for and trace the virus, to care for those who contracted COVID-19 and to develop treatments for those afflicted with any unforeseen long-term symptoms.

The unprecedented scientific advances of the past 150 years would have been wielded to full effect and the novel and deadly pathogen would have been eliminated and ultimately eradicated.

Under capitalism, however, the anniversary was marked by the end of the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center. For the past three years, the tracker has served as a cornerstone for monitoring real time cases, deaths and other necessary data to end the coronavirus.

Johns Hopkins has said the reason for shutting down is that

states have stopped reporting data. Going forward, those who relied on Johns Hopkins will now be essentially blind to the spread of the ongoing pandemic.

More importantly, from the perspective of the capitalist governments, especially the Biden administration, the end of the Johns Hopkins tracker is part of a policy that treats the pandemic as over. Even as 500 people on average die each day in the US and thousands internationally, there is no coverage in the media of the disease.

Biden’s term in office has been characterized by the effort to convince the population that the threat has passed. During his period in office, he ended all remaining mitigation measures, including masking. The US has led the way to the abandonment of all restraints on the spread of the virus throughout the world.

The process reached new heights at the start of the Omicron wave in November 2021, when the variant was declared “mild” and all pretenses of policies to halt the spread of the disease were dropped. Biden foisted responsibility for the continued spread of the pandemic on those that were unvaccinated, claiming that all people who received the vaccine were “protected from severe illness and death.”

The White House initiated a campaign aimed at, in the words of *Politico*, “conditioning Americans” to accept permanent mass infection through the suppression of data. The White House instructed states to reduce the frequency of testing. In January, the Department of Health and Human Services no longer allowed hospitals to report daily cases and deaths, and by the end of the year the CDC had ended daily reporting.

At every turn, Biden’s actions have been guided by the same interests as those of his predecessor Donald Trump, of placing profits over lives. Ever since the beginning of the pandemic, the focus of the American ruling elite has been to use the pandemic to transfer astronomical amounts of money to the financial oligarchy.

From the standpoint of these social interests, the lives of the population, and particularly older Americans and

disabled people who are disproportionately affected, were valueless. This is what CDC Director Rochelle Walensky meant when she declared in January of last year that it was “encouraging” that chronically ill people made up a large proportion of deaths.

Leading politicians, both Republicans and Democrats, as well as major media figures were all aware in January 2020 of the immense danger of the virus that had emerged in Wuhan, China. Their focus, however, was not on saving lives but saving the wealth of the ruling class.

And thus did the capitalists feast. A report by Oxfam from January showed that the wealth of the world’s billionaires increased by \$2.7 billion a day since the pandemic began, collectively increasing their wealth by \$26 trillion since 2020.

As profits have soared, so has the death toll. The third anniversary of the pandemic also occurred alongside an update of excess deaths caused by COVID-19 from the *Economist*.

The policy of mass death in the US has been implemented internationally. Beginning late last year, China, the one holdout in the policy of mass infection, abandoned its Zero-COVID measures, under the pressure of international finance capital. The death toll is colossal, by some estimates more than 1 million.

The pandemic has also provided an opportunity for fascist ideologue Steve Bannon and his Chinese expatriate co-thinkers to invent and promote the Wuhan lab lie, the conspiracy theory that COVID-19 was developed in a Chinese lab, possibly with US funding, and unleashed upon the world. Over the course of the pandemic, this lie, which has no basis in scientific fact, has been seized upon across the US political spectrum to demonize China and shape public opinion for war.

The Wuhan lab lie has also been utilized to foment attacks on scientists and science more generally. The dangers of the pandemic, especially of Long COVID, were obfuscated, and scientists who have spent decades as leaders in the field of epidemiology have been vilified.

In contrast to the response of the ruling class to the pandemic, the working class sought to take action to save lives. As the pandemic spread in March 2020, workers spearheaded plant closures and other measures that ultimately forced the lockdowns in 2020 and parts of 2021.

That the lockdowns were ended before the pandemic was suppressed was the direct result of right-wing and fascistic provocations championed by Trump and his ilk in other countries, such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and ex-British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, to prematurely end the lockdowns and get workers back on the job and pay for the bailouts.

Moreover, ending the lockdowns had bipartisan support and was promoted as the correct policy by the corporate media. It was during this time that *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman coined the phrase, “the cure can’t be worse than the disease.”

Significantly, despite the relentless propaganda campaign during the past three years to minimize the dangers of the disease, many are still concerned about the virus and are trying to protect themselves. A Gallup poll published Thursday showed that 15 percent of Americans are still completely or mostly isolating themselves and that 35 percent are at least partially isolating themselves.

Even more importantly, there is an accelerating movement of the working class internationally, which is the main constituency for eliminating and eradicating COVID-19. Millions of workers in France, Germany and across Europe have gone on strike in recent weeks against cuts to wages, benefits and living conditions. Hundreds of thousands have protested in Greece against mass train crash deaths. Police state measures are being revived in South Korea to silence social unrest. Autoworkers in the United States are mobilizing against Caterpillar, a company with deep ties to the US war machine.

There must be an intersection of this movement and the fight against COVID-19. A pandemic inherently requires a globally coordinated response, and the working class is the only international social force that exists and is capable of carrying out this monumental task. Ending the pandemic stands alongside the fight against climate change and the threat of nuclear war as among the most critical tasks that must be taken up by workers and young people today.

This requires the political perspective of international socialism. The pandemic cannot be resolved on solely a medical or scientific basis. There must be a political struggle against the capitalist social order that allowed the virus to flourish in the first place and consciously refuses to prepare for new variants and whole new pandemics. Workers must align themselves with their fellows in every country, reject all forms of prejudice and nationalism, and fight to reorganize society on a higher, rational, scientific and socialist basis.



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