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By Patrick Martin
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One million infected with coronavirus worldwide, more than 50,000 dead

The world has passed several grim milestones overnight in the coronavirus pandemic. The total number of people infected worldwide has hit one million. More than 50,000 people have died, and in the United States, where COVID-19 seems to be spreading most rapidly, there were more than 25,000 new cases and the death toll passed 5,000.



A COVID-19 patient undergoes treatment at a library that was turned into an intensive care unit (ICU) at German Trias i Pujol hospital in Badalona, Barcelona province, Spain, Wednesday, April 1, 2020.

The epidemic's toll is unevenly distributed at this point, with the advanced industrialized countries, excluding Japan, accounting for the vast majority of the reported cases and deaths.

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The United States, with 331 million people, accounts for 4.25 percent of the world's population, but nearly 24 percent of world coronavirus cases, and 11 percent of coronavirus deaths.

The five largest countries in Western Europe, Italy, Spain, France, Britain and Germany, have a combined population of 321 million, 4.16 percent of the world total, but they account for 40 percent of the coronavirus cases and a staggering 63.6 percent of the deaths.

Sometime Friday, there will be six countries in the world with greater death tolls than China, where the coronavirus first made its appearance late last year: the US, Italy, Spain, France, Britain, and Iran, where there are now more than 50,000 cases.

The fatality rate among those infected varies widely from country to country, in part because of different levels of testing, from 1.3 percent in Germany, to 2.4 percent in the United States, 6.3 percent in Iran, 8.7 percent in Britain, 9.1 percent in France, 9.2 percent in Spain, and an unfathomable 12.1 percent in Italy.

Germany's apparently exceptional status—it has 84,794 cases, surpassing China, but “only” 1,107 deaths—seems likely to be short-lived. Its more developed and better-financed healthcare system, compared to the other European countries, is now groaning under the strain. Germany posted the second-largest increase in cases Thursday, behind Spain but ahead of Italy, and is reaching the point where the death toll could begin to mount rapidly—as has already begun in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, its nearest neighbors.

In Russia, the only large European country not yet in desperate straits, there were 771 new cases Thursday, an increase of 25 percent in a single day.

There is every reason to fear that COVID-19 will strike the less developed countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America with even greater ferocity than in the United States and Western Europe, given their much more limited healthcare systems. The majority of humanity can see their future in the harrowing scenes being played out now in Madrid, Milan, Paris and New York City.

Coronavirus has begun to appear in the Indian subcontinent, in Indonesia, and in the Middle East beyond Iran. There were more than 1,000 new cases Thursday in Brazil, the most of any South American country.

The comparatively low figures from African countries are more likely a reflection of their extremely poor healthcare infrastructure, which makes detection of the virus in its early stages unlikely, and their relative remoteness from international commerce and travel, which only postpones the onset of the epidemic rather than preventing it.

As the United Nations admitted, in a report issued earlier this week, “The COVID-19 Pandemic is a defining moment for modern society,” the greatest such challenge, and threatening the greatest loss of life, since the Second World War. The report warned, “The speed and scale of the spread, the severity of cases, and the societal and economic disruption has already been dramatic and could be more so as it takes hold in poorer nations.”



FEATURED

The working class, socialism and the fight against the coronavirus pandemic

BY DAVID NORTH

But despite the stark warning posed in the UN report, there is not the slightest chance its recommendations for national governments to put an end to war, economic sanctions and trade conflicts, in favor of global collaboration to defeat the coronavirus, has any possibility of realization. Not so long as the capitalist system prevails, and every government acts as the instrument of the capitalist ruling elite, defending its wealth and privileges, not the health and lives of the people.

The coronavirus pandemic is a world event of epoch-making significance, not least in demonstrating the abysmal character of the leadership which the capitalist class has elevated into positions of power: Giuseppe Conte in Italy, Pedro Sanchez in Spain, Emmanuel Macron in France, Boris Johnson in the UK, and the execrable Donald Trump in the United States. This collection of political ciphers, bankers, thugs and ignoramuses is a clear demonstration of the unfitness of the capitalist class to rule.

The moronic stupidity of the American political leadership, in particular, was shown in the comments of Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, a devoted acolyte of Trump, who announced a lockdown for his state Thursday, after a criminally long delay. He admitted that he had

not known, until that day, that COVID-19 could be spread by infected people who themselves did not show any symptoms of the disease.

It is particularly noteworthy that the countries hit hardest by the pandemic up to now are the richest societies on the planet with the greatest resources. Yet it has proven impossible for the capitalist ruling class to make any serious effort to mobilize these resources to provide even the most elementary medical products—masks, gowns, gloves and other personal protective equipment (PPE) needed by healthcare workers on the front lines against the coronavirus.

The social gulf between the ruling elite and the working class was put on stark display Thursday when doctors and nurses held a public protest outside Montefiore Hospital in the Bronx, in New York City, to demand necessary supplies.

Laura Ucick, a resident physician, read a statement: “When I go to work, I feel like a sheep going to slaughter. My colleagues and I are writing our last will and testament. I’m 28 years old. We feel that we may not survive this pandemic, and yet we show up each day at this hospital to take care of our community.”

Xenia Greene, an ICU nurse, followed: “We don’t ask our service men and women to go to war without means to protect themselves, or policemen to work without bulletproof vests. So why, why are we asking nurses to enter rooms with reused masks because we don’t have enough supplies? Then I say, make the supplies.”

As opposed to these impassioned pleas, the White House offered its daily dose of lies, diversions and self-praise, in a “press briefing” whose only purpose was to promote illusions in Trump. It was remarkable that not a single speaker at the press conference even bothered to address the skyrocketing numbers for infections and deaths from coronavirus in the United States. This is a government that takes no responsibility whatsoever for the lives of the people over whom it rules.

Vice President Pence called the US healthcare system “the strongest in the world,” which, given its visible collapse, should serve as a warning, not encouragement. Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner, the scion of a real estate empire with no expertise in healthcare or emergency planning, made his first appearance as a leading figure in the Coronavirus Task Force.

According to a report Wednesday night in *Politico*, the 39-year-old Kushner, husband of Ivanka Trump, “has emerged as perhaps the most pivotal figure in the national fight against the fast-growing pandemic.” Backed by a group of cronies including his former

roommate and several consultants from McKinsey, he has created an alternative power center based in the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which Trump put in charge of day-to-day coronavirus operations.

According to *Politico*, “Federal decision-making is complicated by the fact that Kushner has the full confidence of President Donald Trump, with whom he confers multiple times a day, while Trump has expressed frustration with some of the leaders of health agencies.”

While the Trump administration replicates the degenerate court cabals of Louis XVI and Nicholas II, before the French and Russian revolutions, in its monumental indifference to a tidal wave of suffering and death, it is inviting the same fate.

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