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www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By Benjamin Mateus
22.04.2020

Global COVID-19 infections, deaths rise amid drive to revive corporate profit-making

Despite more than four billion people on the planet being in some form of isolation, the number of new cases throughout the world continues to grow at a steady pace of approximately 75,000 per day. The staggering daily death toll of 5,000 to 7,000 is a reminder of the deadly nature of the pandemic that has brought much of the world to a standstill.



Mass grave on Hart Island, New York City's Potter's field

Nearly 800,000 cases have been reported in the US, representing 32 percent of all infections internationally. The death toll to date is 42,458, almost 2,000 on Monday alone. The US accounts for a quarter of overall fatalities.

The number of cases in the hot spots of New York and New Jersey continues to steadily increase, with still harrowing fatalities. On Monday, nine states each confirmed over 1,000 new cases. By all accounts, given the still very limited access to testing, the figures for infections and deaths from COVID-19 are underestimates.

This is the public health situation with over 90 percent of the US population under some form of stay-at-home order since President Trump declared a state of emergency over a month ago. The economic and social calamity resulting from these measures to rein in the pandemic is only partially reflected in the record number of people—over 22 million—who have filed for unemployment insurance over the past four weeks. Millions of those laid off have lost their health insurance, and thousands are lining up at food banks in cities across the country to receive food to feed their families.

However, rather than using the vast riches of the country to care for the people, the political establishment, from the fascistic Trump to Congress and both big business parties, to growing numbers of state governors and mayors, is working in concert to force a premature return to work that will only add more human fuel to the viral fire.

There is no evidence, despite the constant media talk of “a turn for the better,” that the pandemic is under control. The bogus “guidelines” for reopening the economy announced by Trump last week mark the end of any pretense of a nationally coordinated effort to contain the disease. In reality, they are a green light to force workers back to work, with no protections in place against the virus, to satisfy corporate America’s demands for fresh profits even at the cost of untold thousands of lives.

Health care facilities in Boston, Detroit, New York City, Chicago and Los Angeles continue to be overwhelmed with COVID-19 patients. There are more than 180 refrigerated trailers stationed behind New York City hospitals to hold corpses under conditions where funeral homes and morgues are beyond capacity. In one instance, more than 20 bodies were piled on the sidewalk of a Brooklyn funeral home. Many of the dead who are not claimed will be buried in mass graves with thousands of forgotten others.

The state of Ohio, with nearly 13,000 cases, made headlines reporting that 73 percent of the inmates at the Marion Correctional Institution were infected with COVID-19. Testing of inmates revealed that 1,950 prisoners were positive for the virus, accounting for 20 percent of all cases in Ohio. Along with these, 154 of the institution’s staff members tested positive.

Michigan has also noted that a significant number of its prisoners and staff tested positive for the coronavirus. However, there is no present policy to track COVID-19 in prison populations. The American Civil Liberties Union Ohio advocacy counsel Claire Chevrier noted in her Twitter account, “This was a policy choice.”

Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker reported that hospitalizations are up seven percent, the majority of cases in the state occurring in Chicago and adjacent counties. The hardest hit areas are the poorest sections of Cook County and South Chicago, including impoverished black and Hispanic sections of the working class.

Massachusetts now ranks third in the number of COVID-19 cases, as new surges are reported in Boston’s poor neighborhoods. The death toll is expected to surpass 2,000 this week. According to Governor Charlie Baker, the hospitals are starting to see the effects of the surge.

Last week in Colorado, the JBS meatpacking plant in Greeley had to close after more than 50 of its employees contracted the coronavirus. The union that represents the 3,000 workers at the plant reported that two workers had died.

In an effort at damage control, Vice President Mike Pence told reporters that his task force would quickly bring in resources for COVID-19 testing. Meanwhile, Governor Jared Polis, a Democrat, told CNN, “It will close long enough to test every worker and clear workers to return to work. Those that are cleared are going to return after a short closure...”

Georgia Governor Brian Kemp, whose state saw 1,242 new cases yesterday with 94 deaths, announced that he would allow some businesses, including gyms and hair salons, to open again this week, and hospitals could resume elective surgeries on April 24. Similar announcements were made by the governors of Tennessee and Vermont.

Florida Governor Ron DeSantis opened the beaches on April 17 for “essential activities.” Democratic Louisiana Governor John Bel Edwards, in one of the worst hit states, said he was hoping to lift social distancing restrictions by May 1. Minnesota is allowing recreational activities like golfing, boating and fishing to commence this week.

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, whose state has been the epicenter of the pandemic in the US, said, “It’s time to start opening the valve slowly and carefully,” and suggested that upstate New York might reopen sooner than New York City.

In a revealing comment, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote on Friday that Trump had “asked White House aides for economic response plans that would allow him to take credit for successes while offering enough flexibility to assign fault for any failures to others.”

He plans to starve the states of the resources they need until they allow businesses to reopen, while shifting blame for any repercussions on the states.

Virtually every reputable medical and public health institution has warned that such a reckless course will cost thousands, and perhaps millions, of lives.

An internal document obtained by the *Washington Post* from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Centers for Disease Control warns that the White House’s plan “would entail a significant risk of a resurgence of the virus.” The memo states, “Inside the White House, it has been clear to officials since last week that there is no longer much of a debate—at least with the president—about starting the reopening process May 1... rather, the debate this week has been over how to implement the return, what data could be used to justify the decision, and how to build public support for it to provide the president maximum political cover...”

Yesterday also saw a new report released by Harvard University in conjunction with multiple affiliated institutions. It states that the United States would need to deliver over five million tests per day by early June, scaling up to 20 million by late July, to sufficiently test two to six percent of the population and provide sufficient capacity to test its essential workers.

Since April 6, the US has performed only some 150,000 tests per day, despite the repeated boasting by the White House that it has conducted millions of tests. The shortfall in testing is multifaceted—supply chain issues, inadequate testing centers, nonvalidated tests, a shortage of the necessary reagents for PCR testing and appropriate swabs. Additionally, because the tests were permitted for public use by the FDA under emergency measures, they have yet to be validated, and many in the health community have voiced concerns over false-negative tests.

At Monday’s White House Press conference, Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite, commanding general of the US Army Corps of Engineers, gave a briefing on the building of field hospitals at various locations around the country, such as McCormick Place in Chicago, Miami Beach Convention Center, Colorado Convention Center, TCF Center in Detroit and Javits Center in New York. These are densely populated urban centers.

Many of these hospitals stand ready and empty. It is clear that the government is preparing for the second wave of casualties. The director-general of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said on Monday, “The worst is yet to come.”

Meanwhile, much of the focus of the media and the political establishment is on the completion of negotiations to push through yet another round of bipartisan corporate bailouts, in the form of an additional \$450 billion centered on the cynically misnamed “Paycheck Protection Program.”

With each passing day it becomes clearer to millions of workers in the US and around the world that there is a total divergence in interests between the great bulk of humanity and the tiny, parasitic elite that dominates the world economy and its political establishments. The struggle to put an end to capitalism and establish socialism is literally a matter of life and death.

World Socialist *21 April 2020*