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By Benjamin Mateus
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US coronavirus deaths approach 50,000

Between 1955 and 1975, there were 47,424 US combat deaths from the Vietnam War, a defeat that continues to perplex and stigmatize American imperialism. In approximately one month, the COVID-19 pandemic has killed 49,751 people in the United States. Despite all talk about a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel, the number of new cases has remained consistently over 25,000 per day while the number of daily deaths has kept pace. This pandemic, like Vietnam, is conflating the consciousness of the working class.

In a similarly gruesome vein, Europe's numbers have continued at a steady pace with nearly 29,000 cases and over 3,000 deaths daily. Italy had been Europe's epicenter in mid-March, reaching its zenith on March 21. One month later, new cases in Italy are at half their peak. Europe's fatalities are also declining at a similarly sluggish trend. Spain follows suit while the UK emulates the United States' trajectory.

Globally, at the speed with which new cases are being tallied, before the month's end the pandemic will have reach 3 million cases. Over 200,000 people have lost their lives, which could have been prevented had the ruling elites of the global capitalist nation-state system decided to act in concert to heed the warnings of their own World Health Organization.



Dr. Ala Stanford administers a COVID-19 swab test on Wade Jeffries in the parking lot of Pinn Memorial Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Wednesday, April 22, 2020. (AP Photo/Matt Rourke)

Presently, the only effective measure to stem the health crisis is to continue to shelter in place, which takes its toll on the flipside by creating economic hardship for the population. On Thursday, an additional 4.4 million Americans filed for unemployment, bringing the total to 26 million in the five weeks since lockdowns were imposed in response to the coronavirus pandemic. According to the *Financial Times*, the number of approved claims for unemployment insurance accounts for 11 percent of the entire workforce, approximately 16 million thus far.

Millions more are attempting to navigate the online or telephone application processes that have created a massive gridlock. Up to 17 percent of Michigan's workforce is receiving unemployment benefits. Florida saw a tripling of unemployment benefit applications last week to 505,000, second only to California with 534,000. The hardest-hit states are Michigan, Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Georgia, Louisiana, Nevada, Alaska and Washington, with estimated unemployment rates exceeding 20 percent.

According to the Federal Reserve Board, in the Divisions of Research & Statistics and Monetary Affairs, the leisure and hospitality sector has seen 4 million job positions lost, accounting for over 30 percent of all employees in that industry. Construction and manufacturing have lost almost 700,000 jobs since mid-March. When the April jobs report is released on May 8, JPMorgan Chase is predicting a loss of 25 million jobs, triple the loss experienced in the 2008–2009 Great Recession. An economist at ING, James

Knightley, said, “Less than half of working-age Americans will be earning a wage next month. In an election year, this means that the call for politicians to reopen the economy is only going to get louder, irrespective of the health advice.” This call is arising from the financial sectors.

In a CBS News poll published yesterday, 70 percent agreed that it was essential to slow the spread of the epidemic through social distancing measures, even if the economy was hurt in the short term. Almost two-thirds stated that they are concerned that the outbreak will get worse if stay-at-home restrictions are lifted too fast. The majority said widespread public testing is required before implementing reopening measures. Yet, the United States has lagged behind many countries in adequately ramping up testing. By conservative estimates, the country would need to conduct 500,000 to 700,000 tests per day to begin reopening. And a recent Harvard report calls for at least 5 million tests per day, rising to 20 million a day, “to fully remobilize the economy.”

The National Governors Association (NGA), chaired by Maryland’s Republican Governor Larry Hogan, insists any large-scale plan to return the population to work will require assistance from the federal government to much improve the distribution of testing supplies as well as fortify crumbling public health measures. A report from the NGA states, “Opening prematurely—or opening without the tools in place to rapidly identify and stop the spread of the virus—could send states back into crisis mode, push health systems past capacity and force states back into strict social distancing measures.”

The uncertainty the NGA has voiced in connection to the back-to-work drive underscores not just the public’s psychological concerns. The weight of the evidence and experience that the efforts imposed thus far have only provided temporary breathing room against the onslaught of the last four weeks, which stunned the country as a whole with the terrifying rapidity with which the virus tore through communities. As eagerly as many governors have demonstrated their agreement with Trump’s assessment of the cure being worse than the disease, the disease stands ready on the field.

With a vaccine against the virus, in the best-case scenario potentially available only this time next year, efforts to find a treatment to lessen the impact of the infection on the population have taken on a frenzied state. Despite Trump’s maniacal and negligent attempt to push hydroxychloroquine to treat COVID-19, the drug is proving to be more harmful than doing nothing. The Veterans Affairs study of over 300 people showed the rate of death higher for those on the medication while not impacting the rate of ventilation.

Similarly, Gilead's Remdesivir, an antiviral medication against RNA viruses, appears not to speed the improvement of patients with COVID-19 nor prevent them from dying. The study results had been inadvertently released, leading to a statement by Dr. Merdad Parsey, chief medical officer of Gilead Sciences, who said, "Today, information from the first clinical study evaluating the investigational antiviral Remdesivir in patients with severe COVID-19 disease in China was prematurely posted on the World Health Organization website. This information has since been removed, as the study investigators did not provide permission for the publication of the results. Furthermore, we believe the post included inappropriate characterizations of the study." Gilead Sciences Inc. shares fell 4.34 percent on the news.

The utter depravity of the ruling classes was captured in Trump's remarks during the White House brief yesterday, giving it its most succinct senseless expression. After Bill Bryan, who leads the Department of Homeland Security's science and technology division, presented data that higher temperature, higher humidity, disinfectants and sunlight adversely impact the virus's ability to survive on surfaces, Trump began to gesticulate and suggest, the sitting press in disbelief, "So, supposing we hit the body with a tremendous—whether it's ultraviolet or just a very powerful light—and I think you said that hadn't been checked because of the testing ... and then I said, suppose you brought the light inside the body, which you can do either through the skin or some other way, and I think you said you're going to test that too ... I see the disinfectant knocks it out in a minute, one minute. And is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside or almost a cleaning? As you see, it gets in the lungs, it does a tremendous number on the lungs, so it would be interesting to check that."

The working class faces a threat not only from a pathogen that is highly lethal and infectious, but a capitalist class that is not only disinterested in their welfare, but has also lost the ability to comprehend reality and should be committed to an asylum. Science and scientific socialism are the tools that the working class must use to liberate themselves from the stranglehold of capitalist society.

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