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Capitalism/The cause of COVID-19 deaths



China set up a system for checking the people entering residential buildings for COVID-19 symptoms. Here a security guard checks temperatures on Feb. 26 in Beijing.

June 23 — Does the COVID-19 virus operate differently in capitalist countries than in socialist countries? Based on a comparison of global numbers of fatalities, COVID-19 seems to appear in a more virulent form in capitalist countries. But is this even possible?

The impact of COVID-19 in capitalist countries is more than 20 to 50 times worse than in socialist countries or in countries with high levels of social mobilization. The longer and wider this virus spreads, the clearer this political difference becomes.

By every possible measure of COVID and of deaths due to a host of many other neglected sicknesses, it is clear that the capitalist profit system itself is the greatest danger to people's health and well-being.

Just a comparison of the number of fatalities confirms how criminally responsible that chaotic economic system is for the deaths of millions of people globally.

According to the highly reputable Johns Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Center, which maintains a global daily database, as of June 23 the U.S. has the highest number of COVID-19 deaths in the world — 121,176 fatalities. By the most cautious estimate, U.S. fatalities will continue at a rate of more than 5,000 deaths a week, every week for months, into the future. (coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html)

By the same source for the same date, China by comparison has had fewer than 5,000 total fatalities (4,634 deaths).

More significant is that China has been able to halt the spread of the virus within the country. A “second wave” outbreak on June 11 in the capital, Beijing, with a population of 21 million, led to an immediate, well-organized quarantine, a new round of mass testing and tracing of social contacts. (tinyurl.com/y7y6fv22/)

Before this outbreak, Beijing had not recorded a case of domestic transmission in almost two months. Pei Hao, a Beijing-based global health researcher, explained China's approach: “People need to cooperate in order for any response measure to ultimately be successful.” (tinyurl.com/ycxqxlx5)

Between June 1 and June 10, China retested the entire 11 million population of Wuhan. Each district in the vast city completed its full testing cycle within that period. In China tests are performed numerous times to confirm the virus is being actively contained.

In the U.S., after months of inaccessible and unreliable tests, the number of tests administered are finally increasing to 300,000 a day. At this rate it would take 3 years to

test the U.S. population even once. But President Trump announced on June 20 that he is encouraging a slow down in COVID testing.

For two harrowing months, the devastating center of the COVID virus outbreak has been the New York City and northern New Jersey area. But as the virus recedes there, it is escalating sharply in the South and West of the U.S., reaching its current highest levels in Florida, South Carolina, Oklahoma and Arizona.

There is no expectation that the spread of the virus will be halted within the U.S. Cautious estimates now accept a death toll of 200,000 people by Oct. 1.

Projected spikes based on re-opening businesses and the relaxation of social distancing protocols may further escalate these fatalities. More ominous is that even higher wave of deaths is projected into the winter months. (tinyurl.com/y9e7hlm6)

The measurable death rate of 5,000 fatalities in China compared to over 120,000 fatalities in the U.S., as of the third week in June, is so staggering that it is essential to examine the reason for the dramatically different outcomes.

China, a still developing country with a population of 1.3 billion, has demonstrated to the world that the COVID virus can be controlled and contained with a scientific approach and with a coordinated social mobilization of the population. China is now rushing vast supplies of essential medicines, personal protective equipment and training programs to other developing countries by air, rail and ship.

Cuba, a small, blockaded country of 11.3 million, has also confirmed that, despite sanctions and blockade. the entire population can be protected and maintain good health. Besides protecting their own population, Cuban medical teams have traveled with essential supplies to set up more aid projects for COVID-19 around the world than has the World Health Organization.

Vietnam, with a population of more than 95 million, has had zero reported COVID-19 deaths and only 240 positive cases. Their tactics also involve active tracing measures; clear nationally enforced quarantines with guaranteed food, supplies and essential services; along with mobilization of medical students and retired doctors and nurses to push back the spread of the deadly virus. (For more, see (tinyurl.com/yboto4qa/.)

It's the system

Every field of science needs to cooperate and study this deadly virus to find treatments, a vaccine and a cure. But also needed is the study of the social and economic system that makes a virus so wildly uncontrollable in capitalist countries.

Why was the U.S., even with months of advanced notice and detailed information about this new virus, unable to control the spiraling outbreaks across the country? Why weren't social precautions and medical preparations immediately made? Why were other capitalist countries also unable to protect their populations?

Is it negligence? Or is it a systemic problem?

In the United States, supposedly the most technologically developed and wealthiest country in the world, the whole population faces total dysfunction of the government's social programs that could have controlled the virus. This is true at every level — from testing to quarantines, to providing PPE for essential workers or essential funding for millions of unemployed workers on the brink of evictions and literal starvation. Now food lines have begun to stretch for blocks, sometimes miles. Hospitals in some places are so overwhelmed that the sick are turned away in droves.

Democratic Party politicians have focused strictly on Trump's criminal negligence. But in New York, New Jersey, California, Michigan and Washington State, Democratic Party officials have faced the same uncoordinated medicine-for-profit system at the state and local level.

There has been no coordination in testing, counting or in reporting infection rates or fatalities. National for-profit diagnostic labs compete with each other. Every local testing facility sets its own rates and procedures. Reports are not coordinated at the state or at the national level. States and cities even use different counts.

As the COVID pandemic spirals out of control, the other comorbidities of capitalism arise. The highest toll of sickness and fatalities is every area of the country in nationally oppressed communities of color.

Hunger in children is soaring. With classrooms closed for months because of the pandemic, millions of children are going hungry. More than 20 percent of children are not getting enough to eat. Half of U.S. school children qualify for subsidized meals. Even the limited aid mandated by Congress has reached only 4.4 million of the 30 million hungry children who qualify. (tinyurl.com/yc5gx9tp)

Almost all nonessential medical services have been curtailed. Cancer screenings, sexual health services, drug and stop smoking programs, diabetes, tuberculosis and HIV monitoring, mental health support, dentistry, vaccinations and routine checkups are all on hold.

Thousands of medical workers in all these fields face extreme pay cuts and layoffs. Since all hospitals, including public hospitals, operate in a for-profit funding environment, and since “nonessential” services are often the procedures that make profit, hospitals are going bankrupt at an unprecedented rate.

As job layoffs reach an unprecedented level in all occupations, savings dry up. The rates of dire poverty, hunger, suicide and family violence soar. On May 8 CNN estimated the actual number of unemployed is 43 million — 27 percent of the workforce. (tinyurl.com/y762eqy8/)

In a U.N. report the World Food Organization warned that, even in wealthy countries, indirect deaths could eventually eclipse the number of direct deaths. In the developing world, famines and total social breakdowns are a far greater threat with 130 million people at risk of starvation. (tinyurl.com/yblhr3zv)

In the U.S. a new round of “stimulus” for working people is under vague discussion. But essential social programs for working people are last in line after the Federal Reserve’s urgent need to pump trillions of dollars into the stock market and maintain a military budget larger than that of the rest of the world combined.

But Britain, Italy, Spain, Belgium and other major capitalist countries with highly developed economies have an even higher rate of COVID deaths per population than the U.S. This confirms that the problem is far deeper than the arrogant and racist neglect of the Trump administration.

Blaming China

Because the U.S. has failed to stop the spread or to provide basic care, the government must make every effort to deflect blame. As U.S. prestige around the world has plunged in light of the complete disarray of its response, the push to “blame China” has intensified.

“Who will be tougher against China?” is now a political football in the current U.S. election campaign. Blaming China is also part of the Pentagon’s military “Pivot to Asia.” The China tactic is used to plant the positioning of aircraft carriers in the South China Sea and missile batteries in South Korea and Japan. It is used as further justification for sanctions and a trade war, as well as efforts to sharpen military alliances with India, Australia and the Philippines.

A look at articles in the corporate media on the COVID-19 pandemic finds almost every narration includes at least a paragraph blaming China or attacking China for a slow initial response.

Yet China’s response was stunningly fast in alerting the world and in mobilizing their population and full resources of the state. Compared to the U.S., China acted at the speed of light — and the U.S. at the speed of a tortoise.

Timeline

In evaluating who is responsible for the global spread of COVID-19, it is important to look at the facts, dates and numbers.

The virus was first identified in China and announced to the World Health Organization on Dec. 30, 2019. At that time, although there were several severe cases of a new and unusual pneumonia in China, there was not yet one death.

By Jan. 1, the Wuhan market where it is now believed the virus originated was closed down. Public health notices and detailed precautions to all health departments and medical institutions, as well as online information for a new viral pneumonia of unknown cause, were being rolled out throughout China. (A detailed explanation of these steps of

identification, containment, rigorous testing and treatment is available at tinyurl.com/ruf7er6.

By Jan. 7 Chinese researchers had identified the COVID-19 virus. All this happened before the first reported COVID-19 death in China on Jan. 9.

By Jan. 12 China announced to the world the genetic sequence of the virus and freely shared that sequence in order to aid the world in the mass building of diagnostic kits.

The major high-tech and industrial hub of Wuhan, with a population of 11 million, was under strict lockdown for 76 days. In less than two weeks, over 40,000 medics came from all over China to Wuhan to assist. Meanwhile, quarantine measures were put in place in the whole country. Industries, schools, theaters, parks, sports and all social gatherings had been shut down.

However, under China's social system, rooted in its socialist revolution of 1949, wages were guaranteed and essential services continued. Rent, mortgage and credit card payments were frozen.

In February WHO officially reported: "In the face of a previously unknown virus, China has rolled out perhaps the most ambitious, agile and aggressive disease containment effort in history." The report added, "The remarkable speed with which Chinese scientists and public health experts isolated the causative virus, established diagnostic tools, and determined key transmission parameters, such as the route of spread and incubation period, provided the vital evidence base for China's strategy, gaining invaluable time for the response."

A vaccine is not a cure

Finding treatments and a vaccine for those who test positive will not automatically solve the global pandemic of COVID-19.

That's because the drive to compete at all costs is an ingrained and systemic response of the capitalist market system. That system is deeply threatened by cooperation — even when millions of lives are at stake.

Thus, the U.S. government is refusing to cooperate with China in developing a vaccine. The very idea of learning from China's experience is met with official, racist disdain.

The racism is a cover-up for the fact that cooperation in developing a vaccine is a direct economic threat to far-flung U.S. business interests — and to the capitalist foundation of the U.S. Big Pharma, the pharmaceutical industry, cannot risk a freely available, globally distributed vaccine that would be a dire threat to its corporate profits — and more than enough cause to play the “blame China” game.

In thinking of why the U.S. has failed to contain the pandemic, and why U.S. powers to be spurn global cooperation in finding a cure, it is helpful to consider the prevalence of hunger — in the U.S. and around the world.

Under capitalism, the cure for hunger is completely simple and understood by every human being. Hunger is cured by providing food to the hungry.

Nevertheless, hunger and hunger-related diseases killed 9 million people in 2019, more than from AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. (tinyurl.com/rzvc5ls)

Yet there is no “Race for a Cure for Hunger.” In fact, there is a global glut of food — more than enough to feed every person in the world. But in a world and a global economy in which capitalist property relations prevail, hunger remains a global killer!

In that world, U.S. imperialism — with a still-powerful military force at its command — resists every challenge to its profits. So hunger through economic sanctions is instead used as a weapon of regime change and U.S.-orchestrated coups. Hunger is a problem that is never solved under capitalism

But hunger is the first problem tackled by every socialist country in an organized way. That is why countries that have built and activated a socialist base — like China — have the means and experience to cope far better with an unknown health threat such as a virus.

In a global pandemic, capitalism's ruthless competition is the greatest killer.

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