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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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04.08.2020

Virus statistics reveal class truth

The following is a digest of articles on COVID-19 by Deirdre Griswold that appeared in Workers World from April to June, 2020.

April 14 — Because China is the most populous country in the world, and also the first to become infected with the COVID-19 virus, it is revealing to revisit from time to time the statistics on the epidemic's progress there, compared to what is happening in the U.S.

What can we learn from the way the People's Republic of China has handled this virulent disease?

As of April 13, the U.S. reported a total of 561,159 cases of the coronavirus, with 22,133 deaths. China reported 82,160 cases, with 3,341 deaths. In both categories, number of cases and number of deaths, the U.S. count exceeded China's by about 7 to 1.

This huge disparity becomes even more startling when seen as a proportion of the overall population. Per million people, the U.S. had 67 deaths. China had 2.

China's success in handling this extremely dangerous, and now worldwide, outbreak should be studied and give inspiration to all those fighting the disease. In this country, however, it is totally ignored. China is mentioned only as the source of the problem, never as an example of how to confront it.

The big difference comes from the way the economies of these two countries work. Profits for capitalist owners are the driving force of the U.S. economy. What happens to workers who lose their jobs may become a problem for local and state governments, but mainly for the workers themselves.

The coronavirus in the U.S. has upended everything from the stock market to local businesses to employment. No one knows how long it will take for life to return to any degree of normalcy.

By contrast, the Chinese city of Wuhan, the epicenter of the disease, reopened as of April 8. Foreign Policy magazine wrote on March 25: “After two months of a near-total lockdown in many parts of the country, China seems to be getting back to business, with important indicators like electricity and steel demand and auto manufacturing returning to levels not far from normal.”

China has allowed some capitalist ownership, but its foundation remains a planned economy that is controlled by the Communist Party based in the working class. That’s the big difference underlying China’s achievements in dealing with this dreadful disease.

May 4 — Deflecting anger on to China

The Trump administration is trying to deflect anger at its dangerously neglectful attitude toward the COVID-19 pandemic by blaming China. No surprise there.

It has been known from the beginning that the virus most likely came from a live animal market in the Chinese city of Wuhan, where it jumped the species barrier.

But Trump, counting on the impact of decades of anti-communist propaganda generated by both capitalist parties in the U.S., has stated that the virus originated in an unidentified “weapons lab” in Wuhan — a story first concocted by right-wing radio’s Rush Limbaugh back in February. Trump is even talking about suing the Chinese government for damages.

This president is certainly not known for either honesty or accuracy, but his political base doesn’t care. Racism and xenophobia are his “trump” cards. And he needs to blame someone for what has become the biggest U.S. medical disaster in decades.

Why blame China? Among other reasons, China's success in containing the virus puts the U.S. authorities to shame. And Trump can't have that.

As of May 4, the U.S. had by far the largest number of reported cases in the world: 1,177,918. By contrast, China had 82,877 reported cases. Yet China's population is almost four times that of the U.S.!

What this boils down to is that a person living in the U.S. has been almost 57 times more likely to get the virus than a person living in China — even though China was the first country to have to figure out how to deal with this new threat.

In the U.S., there is another big factor affecting the rising toll taken by the virus: racism. African-American and Latinx people are dying from the virus at a higher rate than white people. This reflects the kinds of jobs that people of color are forced to take, as well as inferior medical coverage and dire health conditions caused by poverty.

The number of U.S. cases reported is undoubtedly an undercount, especially in oppressed communities. It is also becoming clear that many people can be carrying the virus without severe symptoms. Additionally, there is no apparatus set up in the U.S. on a national level to test everyone in order to confirm and curb the spread of the disease.

When COVID-19 first broke out in Wuhan, the Chinese government was able to move quickly and shut down the area. Those in the epicenter were ordered to stay at home while necessities like food were brought to them. Emergency hospitals to care for and isolate the sick were built within days.

China critics in the U.S. called these measures “draconian” in stereotypical anti-communist language.

Instead, Chinese strategies against the pandemic saved countless lives. This was made possible by the collective character of China's socialist system — and the confidence of the population in the decisions made by their leaders.

With a centralized leadership in control of the economy, instead of a hodgepodge of private owners competing for profits, decisive and timely action was possible. In addition, because of government policies, those living in the affected area didn't have to worry

about losing their jobs or being unable to pay rent during the quarantine, even if it lasted for months. By the weekend of May 2-3, China had begun opening up its economy again, very cautiously.

Trump and the right-wing are guilty of many crimes. China bashing is one way they hope to divert attention as economic conditions continue to deteriorate in the U.S. More than ever, people's lives depend on knowing the truth.

June 2 — Withdrawal from WHO

Smack in the middle of the biggest pandemic in a century, President Donald Trump announced he was withdrawing the U.S. from the World Health Organization.

One would expect Trump's decree to bring an outcry from all the people here who specialize in public health. That's happening, but it's not getting the news coverage it deserves.

What gives the White House occupant the power to disregard the medical community and dis all the countries in the world that rely on WHO's expertise to battle multiple diseases? Does Trump join imperial Rome's Nero in spewing out dictats just for the gratification of his ego?

But there's more to it than that.

What's the motivation for Trump's move? Clearly, it's not to protect the health of the population. Just the opposite. COVID-19 is a worldwide problem. People in the U.S. will benefit when a vaccine against COVID-19 is made available, no matter which country's scientists are able to come up with it.

U.S. fatalities from COVID-19 are the highest in the world of any one country. It killed more than 106,000 people here as of the end of May. And already tens of millions of workers in the U.S. have lost their jobs, due to the economic disruption caused by the virus.

It is a matter of extreme urgency that a breakthrough be made to prevent further spread of the disease.

Recently, the WHO announced measures to stimulate international cooperation in the development of a vaccine to counter COVID-19 and to make it available to all countries. That is exactly what the wealthy U.S. pharmaceuticals do not want.

Poorer countries are extremely worried that when a cure or preventive medicine is found, it will be patented by one of the U.S. pharmaceuticals and sold at a price that can bankrupt not just individuals, but nations themselves.

The one bright spot right now is that scientists in the People's Republic of China are working hard on creating a vaccine, and China has announced that it will be made available to the world.

This pandemic makes it clearer than ever that we need to get rid of the capitalist system that profits the very few and build a socialist society that can plan economic development to satisfy human need, not corporate greed.

June 24 — Facts are stubborn things

Take the fact that the People's Republic of China, with four times the population of the U.S., has had far fewer COVID-19 deaths, even though it was the first country to be confronted with this new disease.

How do defenders of the capitalist system deal with that fact?

They don't. They just ignore it.

Yet according to the website Coronavirus Update, which tracks the numbers of cases and deaths all over the world, the facts as of June 22 were these:

The U.S. had a total of 2,356,715 cases of COVID-19 and 122,249 deaths. China had 83,396 cases and 4,634 deaths.

When seen in relation to population size, the contrast is even more remarkable. For every one million people, the U.S. had 369 deaths. China had just three deaths per million people!

At the beginning of May the U.S. had 206 coronavirus deaths per million people. In just seven weeks, that ratio increased to 369 per million.

China's figure has remained the same — three per million.

Just one generation ago, China was still a poor country struggling to develop. The U.S., by contrast, has boasted of its economic and technological prowess for at least a century and a half.

So what are the Chinese doing to combat the virus that the U.S. is not?

It was only a few months ago that we saw accounts of how the Chinese government handled the serious outbreak of the virus in Wuhan. An immediate quarantine of the area was established. Contact tracing was implemented. Almost overnight, new field hospitals were set up to isolate and treat the sick.

China's strength relies on the solidarity of its people to work together in a time of crisis.

It is impossible to ignore the difference in social systems behind these glaringly different outcomes. The U.S. is unabashedly a capitalist country, one where competition is hailed as a virtue — even though the wealthy have the ultimate control.

Also figuring into the spread of the virus in the U.S. is the racism that pervades this society. A recent study by the Brookings Institution on “Race gaps in COVID-19 deaths are even bigger than they appear” concludes that “The age-adjusted COVID-19 death rate for Black people is 3.6 times that for whites, and the age-adjusted death rate for Hispanic/Latino people is 2.5 times that for whites.” Racism pits people against each other and is particularly manifested in competition over jobs. To counter this, progressives have long fought for the slogan “A job is a right!”

China is a country transformed by a socialist revolution that relies not on competition but on cooperation and human solidarity. It is not perfect. How could it be in a world still dominated by capitalist imperialism? But its response to the pandemic shows how far China has come in its journey to transform human relations.

How different from the divisiveness that people in the U.S. get from the capitalist government, no matter which party is in power.

To overcome the imposed divisions in the U.S. that keep the working class from realizing its power to create a better world, change is coming now from the cooperation of movements rising against racism, sexism, mass incarceration and the oppression of immigrants, as well as by people living with disabilities and LGBTQ2S+ people.

Cooperation and solidarity: These are the greatest antidotes to any disaster, natural or human made. And a socialist system develops and strengthens these qualities among people.

June 29 — Socialist cooperation in superior

Databases that track the growth of the pandemic around the world are revealing a highly significant fact: The countries where there has been the most progress toward combating capitalism have also most successfully contained the virus.

Here are some figures, as of June 28, provided by [worldometers.info/coronavirus](https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus):

Cuba stands out, with only eight deaths per million inhabitants. This contrasts sharply with the other populous islands in the Caribbean. The Dominican Republic, which shares an island with Haiti, has had 67 coronavirus deaths per million people. Puerto Rico, a U.S. colony, has had 64.7 deaths per million.

Fidel Castro led the Cuban Revolution to victory over the bloody U.S.-backed dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista in 1959. He announced to the world that the Cuban people had achieved “a socialist revolution under the very noses of the Yankee imperialists.”

Since then, Cuba has become a medical powerhouse, sending doctors and nurses to poor countries around the world suffering from imperialist-imposed underdevelopment.

Another country in Latin America that has successfully controlled the virus is Venezuela, which reports two deaths per million people.

Venezuela’s neighbors include Colombia, where there have been 61 deaths per million; Panama, with 140 deaths per million; and Brazil, now in the grips of a raging epidemic

with 271 deaths per million. Except for Venezuela, the economic systems of these countries are rooted in capitalism.

Venezuela is on a difficult road to socialism because of its dependence on oil and the world capitalist market. The U.S. government has attempted to destroy its economy by imposing sanctions. Nevertheless, Venezuela's success in keeping people safe during the pandemic has in recent weeks led many of its citizens who had left the country to return.

Al Jazeera reported on June 28: "For more than a decade, thousands of Cuban healthcare providers have been living in Venezuela, helping to build up its health infrastructure for working people. At the same time, Venezuela has been subject to U.S. sanctions meant to destroy its economy.

"This led many middle-class Venezuelans to move to neighboring Colombia. But now, because of the high rate of COVID in Colombia, Venezuelans are returning. They are required to stay in quarantine for two weeks before moving around freely, a precaution against spreading the disease."

People's China, where the initial outbreak occurred, has now contained the disease. As of June 28, its COVID deaths average only three per million people, compared to 388 for the U.S. For the same date, new cases in China were 17; new cases in the U.S. were 40,540. New deaths that day in the U.S. were 285 people — and in China, only three.

Facts are facts. Health care is a priority in countries struggling to build socialism in a world where capitalism is still the dominant social system. Capitalism kills people in many ways, but nowhere is the documentation more stark than in the coronavirus figures.

Workers World 02.08.2020