

From global pandemic to global class struggle

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More than one year since COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, the disease is once again surging around the world. Nearly 9,000 people are dying every day. Fueled by the emergence of more contagious variants, the seven-day average for new cases is approaching half a million, up 40 percent over the past month. New cases rose by eight percent last week, the fifth consecutive weekly increase.

In Brazil, now the epicenter of the disaster, there are more than 2,000 deaths a day. Hospitals throughout the country are full. Morgues are overflowing with bodies that cannot be buried.

In India, where most cases and deaths in the country's massive slums go unreported, even the official figures show that daily cases have tripled over the past month.

An average of nearly 200,000 people are infected with the virus every day in Europe, and the trend is rising. Germany, France, Italy and Poland are in the midst of new surges, and Hungary is seeing the largest increase in hospitalizations and deaths since the start of the pandemic.

In the United States, where more than 555,000 people have already died, the pandemic is surging in 24 US states, particularly in the Midwest and Northeast. In Michigan, a center of US manufacturing, cases have increased nearly three-fold over the past month.

Despite the development of highly effective vaccines, there is no serious plan to vaccinate most of the world's population. Even in the major capitalist countries of Europe, less than five percent of the population has been fully vaccinated, while in most of Asia, Latin America and Africa, hardly anyone has received a vaccine.

Two different trajectories arise out of this unending catastrophe, representing the interests of two different classes. The global pandemic is developing ever more openly into a global class struggle.

Despite the resurgence of the disease, governments, led by the United States, are seeking to dismantle all measures to contain the pandemic apart from the chaotic and uncoordinated distribution of the vaccine. The Biden administration is spearheading the campaign to reopen schools, manipulating and falsifying science to do so.

The contempt for human life shared by the entire ruling class was summed up by the fascistic ravings of Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who, directing his anger at a population overwhelmed by the pandemic, said, "Enough fussing and whining. How much longer will the crying go on?"

Calling for an end to all measures to contain the virus, Bolsonaro rebuked the Brazilian people. "How much longer will you stay at home and close everything?" he demanded. "No one can stand it anymore."

Now, as throughout the pandemic, the basic needs of public health are being subordinated to private profit and the endless accumulation of wealth by the oligarchy. Over the past year, the ruling elites throughout the world have made available trillions of dollars, euros and yen to the financial markets, driving up share values to record levels. As a direct result, the wealth of billionaires in the US has grown by \$1.3 trillion, with similar windfalls going to ruling elites internationally.

Millions of people have died over the past year. The International Labour Organization estimates that the world has lost the equivalent of 255 million jobs, while hundreds of millions of people have suffered from the many devastating economic and social consequences of the pandemic. But for the rich, the year has not only been good; it has been great.

As with everything else, the production and distribution of vaccines are being subordinated to both the profit interests of the ruling elites and the geo-

political interests of competing capitalist nation-states. While seeking to hoard vaccines, the United States has thrown billions of dollars at drug makers, giving them the patent rights to publicly-funded research and allowing them to massively overcharge developing countries. As a result, public health experts worry it could be years before substantial sections of the populations of Latin America and Africa are vaccinated.

The American ruling class is using vaccine shortages to bully and threaten its neighbors. Most egregiously, the US is offering to send life-saving doses of its vaccines to Mexico on the condition that it agree to abuse and terrorize refugees seeking to enter the United States.

Instead of devoting the resources necessary to fight the pandemic, the imperialist countries are carrying out a massive military build-up. This month, the UK announced a 40 percent increase in its nuclear weapons stockpile, and the US plans to double its spending in the Indo-Pacific region to threaten China.

All the horrors of the pandemic are now to be compounded by the explosion of militarism and, ultimately, the use of nuclear weapons. This barbarism, accompanied by the promotion of nationalism and chauvinism, is the product of the same capitalist social order that has condemned millions to die from a pandemic that could have been prevented in the first place and contained once it erupted.

This is the trajectory of the ruling class. The trajectory of the working class is class struggle, which raises the necessity for the working class to take political power, expropriate the rich, and transform the gigantic corporations and banks into democratically controlled and socially owned utilities.

The pandemic has galvanized social opposition in the working class. Throughout the United States and around the world, teachers and other education workers are fighting against the unsafe return to in-person schooling. In Morocco this week, police violently confronted thousands of teachers protesting low pay and poor working conditions. In France and Britain, protests have erupted against police violence. In Brazil, oil workers have walked out, shutting down refineries to protest unsafe working conditions and the uncontrolled spread of the pandemic.

Everywhere throughout the world, workers confront a

common struggle and a common enemy. Despite the disaster created by capitalist governments, COVID-19 can, and must, be contained through the closure of non-essential businesses and a massive expansion of contact tracing, testing, and quarantining, coupled with an urgent and equitable global rollout of vaccines.

The pandemic is global and cannot be stopped on a national basis. It requires the international coordination and pooling of scientific know-how and medical expertise, which capitalism and its corollary, nationalism, block at every point. Only the working class can spearhead an international fight against COVID-19 by uniting its struggles and directing them against capitalism.

The implementation of this program requires a political struggle against the entire social and economic order. The eradication of the virus and all that has come from it requires the eradication of capitalism.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its national sections, the Socialist Equality Parties, are the political leadership of this movement. The perspective of the ICFI is based on the necessity for the organization and development of an international and revolutionary working class movement for socialism. The building of the Fourth International now acquires a burning actuality.



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