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Covid-19 statement

# Coronavirus threatens the lives of billions

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**As the devastating novel coronavirus (COVID-19) literally threatens the lives of billions of the earth's people, two truths about the contagion remain unchallenged: All nations are ill-prepared for the arrival of the virus, and once it lands, despite herculean efforts in some cases, little can be done to stop its spread.**

The World Health Organization's (WHO) tabulations as of March 18 indicate that more than 221,000 individuals in over 150 countries, spread across all continents, have contracted the disease. While over 9,000 deaths have been reported worldwide the actual number of people who have contracted the virus and remain asymptomatic is unknown, as is the actual number of deaths.

In addition to China, one of the hardest hit nations is Iran, where scientists estimate the rate and number of infections won't peak until May and by which time some 3.5 million people could die. Officially, Iran has reported just under a thousand deaths, but WHO officials believe the actual death toll could be five times higher.

Italy reported 375 new cases in the last 24 hours, with the death toll topping 3,000. A record 475 of these were reported in a single day, March 18!

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, addressing a mostly empty parliament last week, stated that 533 had died among nearly 12,000 confirmed cases. Spain, like an increasing number of nations, is under a nationwide lockdown.

All schools in the United Kingdom have been closed as Prime Minister Boris Johnson has discarded his previous spectacularly unscientific position, partially echoed by Donald Trump, wherein Johnson proposed allowing COVID-19 to take its "natural" course, as with the common flu, without government intervention a moronic thesis that the contagion would soon burn out leaving behind a "naturally" immunized population!

In Latin America, where just a few days ago zero cases were reported, the Guatemalan government has temporarily suspended the arrival of U.S. deportation flights transporting Central American asylum seekers as part of an asylum agreement with the U.S. Needless to say the current racist ICE raids and mass deportations conducted against some 19 million undocumented immigrants must be stopped immediately, if for no other reason than to allow all afflicted people full and free access to treatment and to eliminate the need of immigrants to lead lives in a semi-underground manner.

In Africa, at least 30 nations covering more than half the continent have confirmed COVID-19 cases. Tunisia's president ordered a 12-hour nightly curfew. Ivory Coast has closed schools and joined other West African nations in barring flights from affected countries.

In the U.S. as of March 17, where some 5,000 cases have been reported as well as 108 deaths, researchers have warned that left unchecked COVID-19 could kill one to two million people in the months ahead.

Germany's Angela Merkel reported last week that as many as 70 percent of the entire German population could be afflicted.

At an estimated fatality rate of one to two percent, tens of millions could die in a relatively brief period of time. In a

single month, October 1918, 195,000 Americans died during the worldwide influenza pandemic, the deadliest month in U.S. history. Some 500 million worldwide fell sick during this 15-month horror, which reduced the earth's population by 3.5 percent.

## Epicenter of the health crisis

The epicenter of the viral contagion, the city of Wuhan in south Central China, has been the focus of ongoing urgent research by Chinese and international health authorities. At the onset of the epidemic, efforts by the Chinese government to unlock the genome of the virus - the virus's complete set of genetic instructions found in its DNA - were successful. In the spirit of international cooperation, China provided their findings to the entire scientific world. This will ultimately allow for the development of a vaccine, a likelihood still 6 to 12 months away. Seeking to corner the market on profits from the pandemic, however, President Trump is reported to have met with officials from a leading German research corporation to entice them to move to the U.S., where their expected vaccine profits would be under the exclusive control of the U.S.

Many unanswered questions remain regarding the virus and its spread. Data so far supports an incubation period of 5 to 14 days before infected parties show symptoms - a major challenge to keeping the disease contained. The viral impact and its mortality rate are greatest among older adults, the obese, and those with underlying conditions such as diabetes, cancer or other diseases that impair one's immune system.

After initial hesitation, the Chinese government began a mobilization of doctors, government workers, Communist Party members, and units of the Peoples Liberation Army and local police to carry out widespread screening of the population in the heavily impacted zones of Wuhan and its province, Hubei. Simultaneously, an initial quarantine of the town and province was implemented followed soon after by a near lockdown of the entire nation.

A prioritized, unprecedented effort began to construct hospitals for quarantine and treatment purposes using prefabricated sections. A workforce approaching 10,000 has been mobilized to work 24 hours a day. In this effort the 1,000-bed Huoshenshan Hospital was constructed and made operational in just 10 days. At another site 25 miles distant the Leishenshan Hospital with 1600 beds was built in two weeks. Numerous additional hospitals ranging from 50 to 1,000 beds have been built or are under construction. Hundreds of other public spaces across China have been converted for quarantine purposes as well.

So exhaustive has been the response to keep the virus contained that the head of the WHO has praised China for having "bought the world time" and that other nations should make the most of it. To date the reported number of new cases has been slowed to the point where a number of the new hospitals have been closed for lack of patients. The graphic "curve" registering the initial rapid rise in reported COVID-19 cases in China has been "flattened," according to some reports, but a crisis of major proportions remains.

## Slanted coverage, revisited tropes in mainline news and right-wing social media.

Despite the massive campaign by the Chinese government to stop the spread of the virus, its efforts were met by the U.S. mainstream media with bias and derision. Day after day New York Times and Washington Post reporters criticized the Chinese government's strict quarantine measures as authoritarian. Yet a few weeks after pillorying China for these "draconian" measures, the U.S. government itself along with virtually all fifty states, if not the entire

world, has recommended and is increasingly implementing similar measures.

### Nature of the current virus

At this moment, the WHO reports that the new coronavirus is a "close cousin" of viruses previously found in bats and likely transferred to small animals. The WHO thinks the current contagion in China possibly originated from people who came into contact with such animals being sold in a food market in Wuhan, and who in turn became transmitters of the virus to other humans. Still other evidence suggests that the earliest infections were in people not associated with the market and the viral jump from animals to humans occurred elsewhere.

This places the COVID-19 outbreak within the category of zoonotic diseases-those that can be transmitted between animals and humans. Scientists estimate this class of disease represents three-quarters of the newly emerging diseases currently affecting people. As with the Avian Influenza, HIV/AIDS, SARS, and Influenza H1N1, the new coronavirus spreads rapidly in an era of globalization and its accompanying travel and trade.

World science does not yet fully grasp the underlying causes of virus formation. It is suggested that ongoing deforestation around the world, including China, has been the result of the expanding need of capitalist-based industrial agriculture to find sufficient lands to grow crops profitably in that mode of production. The deforestation in turn, combined with human encroachment, has altered the existing ecosystems and displaced numerous species. This greater interaction between animals and people is occurring and with it a more serious opportunity for disease transmission.

At the same time a connection is being made between the origin and spread of infectious diseases and an international agribusiness that has bent science to its quest for greater, faster profits. Millions of industrial animals - poultry and pigs, particularly - are being produced with altered genetics, cramped into factory-like quarters, and then slaughtered and shipped long distances in ever-shorter periods of time. Accompanying these industrial farming practices of contemporary capitalist agriculture are the deadly pathogens that mutate and come out of the agri-factories. Today, science has already linked some of the most dangerous viral diseases in humans to modern day food systems, notwithstanding efforts by the U.S. government, which rushed to conceal such evidence during the 2009 H1N1 influenza pandemic, shielding American agribusiness from charges of complicity.

Capitalist agribusiness has shown no interest in alternatives to its profitable production models. Only small segments of modern-day farming operations have experimented with alternatives promoting safety firewalls around our food supply. These include integrated pathogen management, mixed crop-livestock environments, strategic re-wilding and other tactics intended to keep pathogens from developing in the first place.

And Big Pharma, the giant largely monopolized conglomerates that dominate agribusiness and pharmaceutical manufacturing, has no interest in participating in efforts to find healthy and sustainable environmental solution when antiviral vaccines provide a handsome profit in their own right with orders from captive buyers such as governments, hospitals, and drug store chains. Big Pharma's need to advertise for customers, as they do with all sorts of other ailments identified on television, would be minimal with regard to COVID-19-like pandemics where expected profit rates can be expected to rise to unprecedented heights.

### Cuba sets the example and leads the way

Most noteworthy, Cuba, even with its resources severely constrained by the U.S. embargo/blockade, can justly claim the moral high ground for cooperation and solidarity with victims of the coronavirus. Several years ago Cuba entered into a joint Chinese-Cuban effort to produce antivirals, a class of drugs that fight a virus's ability to replicate, while awaiting the development of actual vaccines. Sharing their technology with the Chinese a jointly operated facility was built and opened in China. One of the drugs, IFNrec, is now being employed by the Chinese National Health Commission to fight the coronavirus based on its effectiveness shown previously against viruses with characteristics similar to those of the COVID-19. Cuba's biomedical technology and social goals, unlike so much of the pharmaceutical world, is focused on the need to help viral victims, not the drive to make a profit.

## Science at the service of society

In a socialist society, government institutions such as a National Institute for Health in the U.S. would gather and coordinate research scientists under its own roof. Scientific research would be conducted for the common good, not capitalist profit. All discoveries would be immediately made known to the scientific community worldwide. International collaboration and coordination as opposed to competition would be the norm. Patents and related measures to protect "intellectual property rights" would be deemed absurd and inimical to the interests of society. Funding and coordinating research would be public and massive with the resulting solutions and vaccines the common property of all humanity.

Free vaccines would be available to all via hospitals and clinics, workplaces, schools, and community centers. Gone would be the televised advertising bombardment for high-priced drugs from the U.S. pharmaceutical cartel where critical breakthroughs are sometimes suppressed because a healthy population is not conducive to profits!

In the past week alone reports from officials at the prestigious medical research institutions at the University of California San Francisco and Stanford University indicated that the concerted and coordinated efforts of scientists there had managed to test some 50 known and approved drugs as to their possible effectiveness on COVID-19 in a matter of days, as opposed to a project that in the past would have taken over one year. While the axiom, "Necessity is the mother of invention" seems to apply without qualification in this particular instance, its operation in a profit driven capitalism system, where war and disease are good for profits, is flouted daily.

## Growing national and international economic impact

In addition to the human tragedy widely unfolding, the domestic economy of China, and now the entire world, is taking major hits. The quarantines and lockdowns across Hubei province are preventing business-related travel as well as the movement of goods and workers. Areas where there has been infection, or the possibility of exposures, have kept people in their homes. Restaurants, amusements, shopping malls, transport providers and virtually most other establishments are experiencing a major negative impact. Within weeks China's experience has been increasingly replicated worldwide.

China is the world's largest manufacturer, and because of this role the entire world supply chain is being impacted, often in complex ways. With the globalization of capitalism many international companies are doubly affected, first by reduction of products being made for them in China where wages are lower, and then by reduced sales of finished goods to the up-to-now burgeoning Chinese domestic markets. China's exports range from parts and finished goods to the world's electronics sector, to every sort of part for the global motor industry, including assembled BMWs, to household furnishings and medical supplies, deliveries for all of which have been largely suspended.

Raw materials purchased overseas by China are being placed on hold as well causing additional disruption. Machine tool and construction equipment orders are significantly lagging. Oceanic transport has been stifled and air travel to and from China has been severely curtailed, with flights canceled by Delta, United, Lufthansa and British Airways.

## Trump's March COVID-19 economic proposals

The various loopholes in last week's bi-partisan House of Representatives bill that supposedly provides extended relief for everyone, effectively excludes 80 percent from coverage. The aid package guarantees paid sick leave to less than 20 percent of American workers. It does not apply to companies with 500 or more employees, and workplaces with fewer than 50 employees can request to opt out. On March 17, the White House also ordered the suspension of evictions and foreclosures through April, although whether the president's decree has the force of law is questionable to say the least.

On March 18, now more aware of its previous passivity in the face of an imminent social disaster, the Trump administration announced a \$500 billion proposal to grant all U.S. households a \$1,000 payment, or perhaps two such payments. But Trump was quick to add that literally trillions of dollars more were in the government's immediate hopper in an effort to forestall what appears to be yet another great depression, exceeding in magnitude the financial collapse of 2008.

Economists are increasingly pointing to likely Eurozone, Japanese and U.S. recessions together with declining economies elsewhere. The U.S. casino capitalist stock market has taken its greatest hit since the Great Depression of 2008, with the Dow Jones industrial index losing some 9,000 points, or thirty percent, to date. The market's wild swings portend drastic declines in the world's GDP and massive layoffs of tens and hundreds of millions of workers.

The closure of all U.S. auto plants with no guarantees to laid off workers was met by AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka with a demand that all laid off workers receive their full wages and benefits. Trumka's demand represented a substantial break with the AFL-CIO's past "partnership/collaboration" with the barons of industry that always subordinated workers' interests to capitalist profits. His new demand will undoubtedly be carefully scrutinized by union workers when future opportunities for effective fightbacks inevitably appear.

## Ruling class bailouts continue with abandon

As with the Great Depression of 2008, governments worldwide, at the behest of their ruling classes have reduced borrowing interest rates to near zero. Allowing corporations to borrow virtually free money they reinvest once again in speculative financial ventures having little or nothing to do with improved infrastructure projects associated with job creation, hoping to pocket greater profits. Incredibly, these billions and trillions of dollars pumped into financial markets are matched by multi-trillion dollar bailouts and tax breaks to the same corporate elites. Each near-daily announcement of these government pledges to the rich, based on the issuance of computer-generated government bonds, is aimed to stem the panic of the elite whose paper fortunes evaporate to the tune of \$trillions, sometimes daily. Meanwhile the most elementary aspects of survival for the vast majority from the pathogenic onslaught are largely absent - from the availability of protective gloves, to face masks, sanitizing hand swipes, and mass testing, to basic life-saving medical devices like ventilators.

## The unpredictable future

## Coronavirus threatens the lives of billions

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The proverbial chickens have come home to roost. The international capitalist system has registered only minimal efforts to solve the problem of infectious viral diseases. In this century alone the planet has encountered over two dozen new strains and "near nothing real was done about any of them," according to Dr. Rob Wallace, author of the groundbreaking book, *Big Farms Make Big Flu: Dispatches on Infectious Disease, Agribusiness, and the Nature of Science*. Monthly Review Press, 2016.

How long it will take to bring the current pandemic to a halt is the major social, political and economic question posed before the entire world. It is doubtful that the world capitalist-imperialist behemoth will prove capable, amassing the resources to once and for all tame these terrible contagions. Indeed, the Trump administration cut funding for pandemics like COVID-19 to the tune of \$15 billion! At a time when the combined scientific research capacities of the world are overwhelmingly allocated to endless varieties of military research, to the detriment of health and medical investigation, prospects for rapid progress are dim to say the least.

In the context of a highly monopolized military-industrial complex, endless wars are the most profitable of all capitalist enterprises. Mass destruction of nations' entire infrastructure in the ongoing seven wars presently waged by the U.S., along with drone wars, Special Operations death squad wars, privatized mercenary army wars, and militarily-enforced sanction wars, make for the highest profit rates on earth. The U.S. sanctions on Venezuela alone cost the lives of an estimated 50,000 Venezuelans. And this was before the present COVID-19 pandemic.

The U.S. trillion dollar annual military expenditures accounts for 68 percent of the all government discretionary spending. This undeniable insanity was recently evidenced when the Trump administration waited until just a few days ago to scale back on sending 30,000 U.S. troops to participate in European Union "war games," that is, practice for anticipated real wars to come. When most nations on earth are imposing absolutely necessary travel restrictions, the U.S. imperialist beast, ignoring the potential to expose additional millions to contamination of COVID-19, only recently and in the face of worldwide condemnation, decided to "scale back" its war games.

The right to be free from infectious diseases is a prime expectation of all humanity. When governments fail in this critical arena their excuses no longer find receptive ears. Anger, voiced rightful indignation, and civil outbursts begin to occur. How this pandemic will play out amidst the growing international radicalization is a question on the table for all of us.

Serious socialist activists and working class fighters will prioritize the following demands:

**" Free quality healthcare for all.**

**" Nationalize the health care system and scientific research institutions and place them under the control of working people not the corporate profiteers.**

**" \$Trillions now for critical medical supplies and equipment, free COVID-19 tests, food for the hungry and housing and care for the homeless.**

**" Bail out the working class not the corporate elite. \$Trillions for full pay and benefits for all workers who lose their jobs due to the COVID-19 pandemic.**

**" A national moratorium on all evictions, foreclosures, rent, mortgage and utility payments and debt payments.**

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" **Abolish ICE and close all deportation centers. No deportations. No human being is illegal.**

" **Empty the prisons. Rehabilitation, not racist and classist mass incarceration.**

" **Not one penny for imperialist war, deadly sanctions, embargos and blockades.**

" **\$Trillions for a rapid conversion from the present deadly fossil fuel-based energy system to a clean sustainable nationalized system under workers control to preserve life on earth itself.**

" **Close all military bases and convert them to free hospitals for all.**

" **End racist, sexist, anti-immigrant, LGBTQI and senior citizen discrimination.**

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Source [Socialist Action](#).

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