

US Imperialism: Where Life is subordinated to Profit

The US President's cynical approach towards early imposition of lockdown and then push for rapid reopening of the economy, while thousands facing death and millions facing hunger, is nothing but shirking responsibility of protecting health and human life in combating the spread of Covid-19 pandemic. Beyond this, the ruling classes are propagating capitalist justifications for human suffering and death.

Trump ignored the scientific evidence and analysis of the spread of Covid-19 and allowed it to spread. He has vehemently argued for reopening of the economy all along and on 16th April announced the so-called guidelines for reopening. There is absolutely no factual evidence, let alone scientific analysis, that can justify the reopening.

The pandemic is exacting a horrifying toll in human life. During the 24 hours that preceded Trump's announcement, the corona virus claimed 4,591 lives in the US. This number was more than a 75 percent increase over the 2,569 deaths during the previous 24-hour period. Over the past three days, the nationwide death toll has risen from 26,000 to over 36,000.

It is widely recognized that the official figure substantially undercounts the total number of deaths. There is no reliable tally of people dying outside of hospitals, either of an undiagnosed COVID-19 infection or of causes related to the pandemic.

President Donald Trump signed a historic \$2.2 trillion relief package into law on March 27. The bill, the biggest economic stimulus package in United States history, was passed unanimously by the Republic-controlled Senate by voice vote with near-universal support in the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives on March 26. The bill is a bailout for the US monopoly capital including the finance capital represented by big banks, while providing limited and temporary aid to workers hit by the economic impact of corona virus pandemic.

The \$2.2 trillion bill, equal to more than half of the entire federal budget and far in excess of the \$700 billion bank bailout bill passed in 2008, substantially underestimates the actual scale of the government handout to big business. The biggest beneficiaries of the relief bill are the corporates – a quarter of it, \$500 billion, goes to them. Of this, \$50 billion is to be dedicated to the airline industry. But the biggest chunk, at least \$454 billion, will be to back Federal Reserve-based corporate loans. The Fed has the magical power to leverage, or multiply, money it receives from the Treasury up to 10 times over – this means effectively a funding of up to 4.45 trillion for corporations.

It sets aside \$350 billion in loans and aid to small businesses, which are defined as enterprises with up to 500 employees. This could include multi-billion-dollar hedge funds and other financial firms.

There is also \$50 billion for an "employee retention tax credit" to companies that keep their employees on the payroll.

The bill includes two main provisions providing aid to workers. It allocates \$300 billion for direct cash payments to more than 150 million households. Those eligible, who do not include undocumented workers, will receive \$1,200 per adult or \$2,400 per couple, plus an additional \$500 for each child. This is a one-time subsidy.

In addition, the bill allocates \$250 billion to extend unemployment benefits by 13 weeks and add \$600 per week to the benefits provided by the states. This federal supplement is to end in early August for workers filing claims this week. The bill also makes freelance and gig workers eligible for the same unemployment benefits.

The bill's passage coincides with Trump's push to "open up" the country and force workers back into the plants and workplaces to resume pumping out profits for big business.

Senior reporter Zach Carter wrote that the bill "represents a transfer of wealth and power to the super rich from the rest of us, with the support of both political parties—a damning statement about the condition of American democracy."

"Giving one time \$1200 check to some families and telling them 'good luck' is not going to cut it. It is like handing them a leaky bucket to deal with a flood" said Kyle Herring, president of a group- Accountable US. "And what about the millions of struggling borrowers who do not know how they will pay their next private student loan or those who fall victim to predatory lenders during these desperate times?"

The CARES Act, which President Donald Trump signed into law in late March, included \$100 billion in funding for U.S. hospitals, and the interim stimulus bill passed last month authorized \$75 billion more.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has wide discretion over how those funds are distributed, and critics are warning that the Trump administration is using that authority to deny relief to providers that serve more vulnerable populations. As *Common Dreams* reported last month, the White House tapped the nation's largest private health insurer, UnitedHealth Group, to help distribute \$30 billion in hospital funds.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported late last week that the Trump administration's "program to aid hospitals and doctors on the front lines of the corona virus crisis is leaving behind the nation's Medicaid safety net — the pediatricians, mental health providers, and hospitals that serve the poorest patients."

"That result is likely to deepen inequalities in America's healthcare system as tens of billions of dollars of federal assistance go primarily to large medical systems that serve higher-income patients with Medicare or private health insurance," the *Times* noted.

Public health experts, state officials, and frontline medical workers are sounding the alarm and demanding an urgent change of course as the Trump administration disproportionately allocates Covid-19 relief funds to higher-revenue hospitals while restricting the flow of aid providers that primarily serve low-income people.

As soon as the CARES Act was introduced, the focus of the media began to shift toward an aggressive campaign for a return to work. There could be no delay. The massive increase in fictitious capital—more than \$2 trillion in digitally created debt—was to be added to the Federal Reserve's balance sheet within less than a month. Additional trillions of dollars of debt will be added in the coming months. This represents, in the final analysis, claims on real value that must be satisfied through the exploitation of the labor power of the working class. The greater the debt incurred by the state-sanctioned creation of fictitious capital, the more urgent the demand for a rapid end to restraints based on public health considerations on the process of profit extraction.

On April 11, *The Times* in a column titled "the Pandemic and the Will of God" asked the readers to consider "how suffering fits into providential plan". Another essay proclaimed that "to philosophise is to learn how to die" and its writer concluded "Facing death can be a key to our liberation and survival"

At another level, the *New York Times Magazine*, held a discussion on April 10 under the title, "Restarting America Means People Will Die. So When Do We Do It? Five thinkers weigh moral choices in a crisis." In its introduction to the text, the *Times* asserted that it will become necessary to accept that there is a "trade-off between saving lives and saving the economy." While in the short-term the two goals may be aligned, in "the longer run, though, it's important to acknowledge that a trade-off will emerge—and become more urgent in the coming months, as the economy slides deeper into recession."

In its analysis of the "trade off," the *Times* proceeds from the unquestioned premise that economic interests can only be those of the capitalist class. The profit system, private ownership of the productive forces, and vast personal wealth are unalterable and eternal. Therefore, the "trade off" requires, inevitably, the sacrifice of human life, specifically, the lives of working people.

These justifications are not confined to US imperialism alone. The *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, the main voice of the Swiss ruling class, posted an article yesterday that asks: "Do you want to live forever? ... Some things here seem to be—literally—crazy. But also the collateral damage of disease with its wanton acceptance of the destruction of the economy provokes the whole question. Anyone who wants to put it drastically could say: We choose economic suicide to prevent individual elderly people from passing away a few years earlier than would be expected under normal circumstances."

The advocacy of a policy that accepts the culling of the aged and weak finds its most fascist expression in a essay published on April 13 in the German newsmagazine *Der Spiegel*. Titled "We need to talk about dying," it is written by Bernard Gill, a sociologist who has been associated with the Green Party.

"Our life," Gill declares, "is not conceivable without death." But those who seek "to contain the infection with all means, also fights dying with all means." Gill advocates an acceptance of the natural spread of the pandemic—based on the program of "herd immunity"—which views "dying

as a natural process that is individually painful for those involved, but from a distance makes room for new life.” With this approach, Gill argues, “we come to terms with the microbes in the knowledge that our life without death is unthinkable. We console ourselves with the prospect of new life.”

These are arguments with which Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, who committed suicide 75 years ago this month in his Berlin bunker, would have readily agreed.

These reactionary and inhuman ideas arise not from the sick psychology of individuals, but from the needs of the capitalist system to amass profits by exploiting the labour power of workers.

Raking up national chauvinism is a tool for all the reactionary ruling classes to deceive the people. The ardent advocates of globalization are now instilling national sentiments.

US Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross set the tone back in January, when he declared that supply chain disruptions in China, resulting from the virus outbreak, would encourage US firms to shift their operations back to American soil.

The Japanese government of Shinzo Abe has set aside \$2.2 billion from its economic stimulus package to assist manufacturers to shift production out of China.

A *New York Times* article by Neil Irwin on April 16, entitled “It’s the end of the world economy as we know it,” cited remarks by Elizabeth Economy, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, who said there was a “rethink” underway over how much each country wanted to be reliant on another. The article noted that France’s finance minister has directed French companies to re-evaluate their supply chains, to become less dependent on China and other Asian nations.

The problems faced by the humankind are not sole products of globalization but rooted deeply in the very system of capitalist production. The experience of the past two centuries shows that it is not possible to develop independently by any country as long as imperialism exists. The slogans of return to national economy are only meant to divert the people aspirations for an equitable and just society. And the captains of capitalist system continue their exploitation that leads them to war and devastation - that is the irreconcilable contradiction of the capitalist production.

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