

Trump Will Sacrifice Tens of Thousands to Reopen Economy, Win Reelection

May 10, 2020



This article was written for L'Anticapitaliste, the weekly newspaper of the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) of France.

President Donald Trump is driving the United States toward complete loss of control of the coronavirus pandemic, a development that will lead to tens or even hundreds of thousands of deaths and further devastation of the economy. Today the United States has 1.3 million known cases and 78,763 official deaths while 40 million people or 24.9% of the workforce are unemployed. With Trump's plan for reopening next month's death toll will continue to rise and the economy could virtually collapse.

Trump ended federal guidelines for dealing with the coronavirus such as social distancing and turned responsibility over to state governors, suggesting that they could reopen if their states meet certain preconditions, above all a decline in new cases. Already more than half of the states plan to lift many restrictions and begin reopening the economy, even though they do *not* meet the criteria.

Health experts predict reopening now will lead to a surge in cases and deaths. With states reopening, the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation has doubled its estimate and now predicts that there will be nearly 135,000 deaths in the United States by the beginning of August. One distinguished researcher believes that the U.S. death toll could reach 350,000 to 1.2 million.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control prepared detailed guidelines for reopening, including

recommendations for child care programs, schools, religious groups, employers with vulnerable workers, restaurants and bars, and mass transit. But, as *The New York Times* reported, “White House and other administration officials rejected the recommendations over concerns that they were overly prescriptive, infringed on religious rights and risked further damaging an economy...”

The alternative—more testing, more contact tracing, a more gradual approach—would mean fewer deaths, and is preferable, but also unlikely to revive the economy and certainly not before November. So Trump is not interested.

Reopening is Trump’s reelection campaign. He needs a strong economy to win reelection in November, and to win he is willing to sacrifice hundreds of thousands of lives. Yet it is clear that his reopening strategy is likely to lead within a month to a second wave of infections, increased cases and more deaths, which will force more business closings. Trump may not only take hundreds of thousands of lives, he could also destroy the economy in the process, and, ironically, lose the reelection.

Mark Zandi of Moody Analytics writes, “A serious second wave of the virus would be fodder for a cataclysmic double-dip recession and what would likely be considered an economic depression.” He believes that with the best of conditions, that is the development of a vaccine in mid-2021, “the economy won’t be in full swing and fully recovered until mid-decade.” The vaccine is key, but based on comparison with development of other vaccines such as SARS and HIV, it has been suggested that we might have a vaccine as early as August 2021 or as late 2036!

The Second Great Depression is already here. Some 30 percent of small businesses have shut down and most others are operating at far less than capacity. The \$3 trillion relief packages—too small, poorly managed, and full of inequities—cannot save Main Street. Annie Lowry of *The Atlantic* magazine writes, “Across the United States, millions of small businesses are struggling, and millions are failing. The great small-business die-off is here, and it will change the landscape of American commerce, auguring slower growth and less innovation in the future.”

While Trump’s presidency becomes more authoritarian every day. All of this means that there will be no return to normal and that the struggle between capital and labor will take place on a completely new terrain. (We turn to that in our next article.) What we need is an economic restructuring for people, not profits.