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Speak Out Now

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The Coronavirus Exposes a Sick System

The coronavirus (COVID-19) has spread to over one hundred countries, infecting more than 110,000 people and killing 3,825 people so far. There have been 554 confirmed cases and 22 deaths in the U.S.

Scientists from around the world are warning that the virus poses a serious global threat and will spread to a significant number of people worldwide, possibly infecting as many as 40% to 70% of the adult population. It is too soon to tell the extent of the risk but as the virus continues to spread, it has the potential to kill millions of people – just how many people depends on the emergency response from governments.

The response of the U.S. government shows a complete neglect for our lives. The Trump administration is treating this virus as if it is the seasonal flu – even though it is spreading more rapidly and likely has a much higher mortality rate. Trump put Vice President Pence in charge of the outbreak, a person with no medical experience whatsoever and with a complete disregard for science in general.

The only way to possibly contain the virus was to rapidly identify the infected and quarantine them from the public. But the government never did this because it would be too expensive and likely cause too much disruption to the economy and the profits of corporations. With no justification, Trump said it would be over in a matter of weeks. Trump even suggested that people are going back to work and getting better – lies! While Trump reassures the markets, the virus has spread to the point where it can no longer be contained.

Scientists are urging that millions of people need to be tested in the U.S. But maybe a few thousand at most have been tested so far. The first testing kits the Center for Disease Control (CDC) issued didn't work and had to be sent back. And there are still not enough testing kits to meet the needs of mass testing.

While the government fails to provide them, labs across the country have developed their own tests with limited resources. And so hospitals can only order tests for those with severe symptoms, even though the virus

can spread when a person has no symptoms at all. If a person has mild symptoms, they are just told to stay home. Of course, most people with mild symptoms just go about their normal lives, untested and assuming they have a cold or the regular flu. It's a recipe for disaster.

The CDC says that a vaccine is at least one year away and they make no promise of how much it will cost. In order to reduce transmission of the virus, they have advised the general public to wash their hands frequently, to stay home if they develop mild symptoms, to go to the hospital only if they have severe symptoms, and to work from home.

This is absolutely crazy. Most workers cannot afford to miss work and work from home. Most workers have little or no paid sick leave, and usually work while being sick unless it is severe. Working from home is a luxury for a few highly paid workers.

If the priority was to contain the virus, the government would be shutting down work and schools until mass testing could be carried out and workers would receive full pay. Hospitals and public health departments would have funds, supplies and personnel to carry out mass testing. All of this could be done. But instead Trump is pretending this isn't even a disaster.

Behind the government response is the private health care industry. Drug and insurance companies and private hospitals are more concerned about who's going to foot the bill than who's going to die from all of this inaction. Trump, their man in Washington, minimizes the problem so the health care industry won't have to pay. We see a government that has accepted the continued spread of the virus and is more concerned with protecting the stock market and the profits of corporations than the health and lives of working people. What criminals!

We don't know whether the coronavirus will lead to a worldwide death toll in the tens of thousands or the tens of millions. But what we do know is that this virus is showing the world just how sick this whole system of capitalism is.