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Speak Out Now

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A Viral Threat Turned into a Global Disaster

Two months ago, on January 15th, the second death from a virus was reported in Wuhan, China. Since then Wuhan and the coronavirus (COVID-19) have become household terms. More than 156,000 cases of infection have been identified and 5,819 deaths have been reported in 142 countries.

Viruses are a part of the natural world but there is nothing natural about the response to this virus. Just about every government, from China, to the U.S., to those in Europe has helped create a world-wide crisis by their inadequate responses.

With the onset of the virus in China, the world looked on as, after failing to respond, the Chinese government was forced into action, shutting down Wuhan and other cities and mobilizing resources to try to deal with the pandemic. Most governments did nothing, refusing to take immediate steps to prepare for the impending crisis. They waited to respond after the onset of the pandemic in their countries – closing schools, restricting travel, preventing large gatherings etc. But it is too little too late.

The U.S., with all its resources, is lagging behind. The reported number of people infected is low because of the lack of testing. Most doctors can't access tests or get them processed quickly. There is no way to respond to clusters of the virus if we don't know where they exist. It is easy to point to Trump's stupidity, but the entire system stood paralyzed in the face of the reality of the impending pandemic. Many states in the U.S. have larger budgets than many countries, but the governors did little or nothing. They chose to wait on the Federal government.

We face the outbreak of a major pandemic in the U.S. Hospitals, are over-crowded, and understaffed and unprepared for what lies ahead. A crisis is looming weeks ahead. The healthcare-for-profit system has cut the healthcare system to the bone. There is no room for additional patients in hospitals, certainly no room for the tsunami of people, infected with the virus, who will soon flood the system. Hospitals lack the basics like masks, gowns, eye protection for staff and ventilators for patients.

What's the problem? South Korea tests 10,000 people a day. That's more than have been tested in all of the U.S. so far! The Chinese government ordered the mass production of masks, protective equipment, and respirators and had a 1000 bed hospital built in 10 days, with another constructed soon after. The U.S. can't produce essential medical equipment, including ventilators, virus test kits, masks, hand sanitizers or other basics?

The reason for this inaction is the same everywhere. The governments exist to protect the interests of the capitalists. Washington's response to the falling stock market was to immediately issue \$1.5 trillion dollars in short term loans. Imagine what that \$1.5 trillion could provide to people. New medical facilities could be established. A program of massive testing could be carried out. All people would be cared for - with food and decent housing. This should be the normal functioning of society.

But it is not. Instead an estimated 87 million people in the U.S. are without adequate healthcare. When a society faces a crisis, its problems are magnified. Instead of providing support, Congress has tied itself up in knots over whether people should be guaranteed a basic income and protections if they are sick, or without income.

During these challenging times our connections with each other are clearer. We are linked locally and internationally. Our health depends on one another. But, for now, to protect ourselves and slow the spread of the virus it means that we have to maintain a "social distance" so we don't get infected or infect each other. Our lives depend on each other. It is true that we cannot link our forces physically at this time. But we can take this time to understand what we are up against. And it's not just this virus. It is the capitalist system that has turned this into a worldwide crisis. It is a crisis that can't and won't be dealt with by those who created it. It's up to us.

This little virus has put the entire capitalist system on trial. The verdict is clear. Guilty of negligence and homicide.