

United States: Coronavirus and Crises of U.S. Capitalism

Thursday 2 July 2020, by [SHEPPARD Barry](#) (Date first published: 1 July 2020).

In the United States we are facing a number of interrelated crises: the coronavirus, the economy, institutional racism including police violence against African Americans, disarray in the federal government, and climate change.

The new upsurge in virus infections is increasing. Spikes in new cases are being reported in 36 states as of June 29. An article in the June 28 New York Times was headlined “Cases Soaring As Leadership On Virus Fails.”

“More than four months into fighting the coronavirus in the United States, the shared sacrifice of millions of Americans suspending their lives – with jobs lost, businesses shut down, daily routines upended – has not been enough to beat back a virus whose staying power around the world is only still being grasped” the article said.

“The number of new cases this last week surged dangerously high, to levels not ever seen in the course of the pandemic, especially in states that had rushed to reopen their economies. The result has been a realization for many Americans that however much they have yearned for a return to normalcy, their leaders have failed to control the coronavirus pandemic. And there is little clarity on what to do next....

“There was ‘real hubris’ on the part of public health officials at the very start, Dr. Schaffer, an infectious disease specialist at Vanderbilt University, said, that the United States could lock down and contain the virus as China had.

“That futile hope helped create an unrealistic expectation that the shutdown, while intense, would not be for long, and that when it was lifted life would return to normal.

“That expectation was reinforced by President Trump, who has downplayed the severity of the crisis, refused to wear a mask and began calling for for states to reopen even as the virus was surging. A lack of federal leadership also meant that states lacked a unified approach....

“Just as the country needed to stay shut longer, many states with Republican governors – took their foot off the brake, and Mr. Trump cheered them on.”

Some states with Democratic governors also opened up too soon and too much, and are seeing spikes – notably California.

The accelerating new upsurge hasn’t stopped the Trump administration from continuing to claim that the virus has been contained. Trump says that what we are witnessing are the “dying embers” of a soon to be extinguished pandemic.

On June 26 Vice President Mike Pence talked of the “remarkable progress” the nation has

experienced. He claims, “We slowed the spread. We flattened the curve. We saved lives.”

Laurie Garrett — a prize-winning science writer and the author of *The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance*, and *Betrayal of Trust: The Collapse of Global Public Health* — was interviewed on Democracy Now.

She said, “Let’s be clear. This whole situation in the United States is a failure to develop a federal strategy. So we have no real overarching strategic plan that creates a webbing between the various states so that we don’t have a situation where states are competing against each other or undercutting one another, as is now the case and has been for months now.”

While the U.S. represents about a quarter of reported cases, if the next largest – Brazil, India and Russia – are added in, Garret said, “you make up half of the entire global total of this pandemic. And that means unless we control our efforts in our country and those other three, the whole world gets imperiled by reinfection and reinfection and reinfection....

“So we have a duty not just to ourselves and to Americans ... but to the whole planet, and in particular to countries that don’t have the resources we have, that don’t have the capacity to conquer their own outbreaks, whether they’re desperately poor or they lack an entire infrastructure of health or both.”

Testifying before Congress on June 30, Dr. Fauci, the head of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who has become well known for his leadership regarding the virus, warned that the situation is “moving in the wrong direction.” He said that the daily number of new cases, now at around 40,000, could reach 100,000 if this new surge is not contained soon.

We have seen a massive recession from the shutdown caused by the virus, and then Trump’s call to completely reopen the economy back to what it was before the pandemic. Even if that were done, there would be no guarantee that the economy would snap back from the deep recession immediately, as Trump wants to bolster his election prospects.

The economy never opened up to that extent, and the new upsurge of virus infections excludes that from happening and threatens to make any recovery long and slow, and even may trigger another downturn.

The virus began to make more known the institutional racism oppressing Blacks and other people of color, as it became evident that the infections and deaths disproportionately affected them. Then the economic downturn was revealed to also disproportionately hit people of color the hardest.

The magnificent upsurge of the mass movement led by Blacks that began in response to the police murder of George Floyd and rapidly became a movement against the whole racist system brought the truth home to a wide section of the U.S. population, and is having a deep impact.

Trump’s militaristic and openly racist response to the Black Lives Matter upsurge, and his complete failure to lead a national response to the pandemic (in fact quite the opposite) are causing a drop in his poll numbers. As a result, he is becoming more openly racist (e.g. retweeting a video of a white nationalist screaming at a BLM protester, “white power! white power!”) to mobilize his hard racist following. He is digging in on his claims that the election will be rigged if it goes against him.

The virus and the Black-led upsurge is causing further disarray between both capitalist parties and within them. Trump’s hold on the Republicans has begun the fray. The government is paralyzed, and cannot get anything meaningful done, except where both parties agree on imperialist policies.

The Supreme Court is legislating with mostly reactionary rulings, but with some setbacks for Trump as Chief Justice Roberts, fearful of the Court's reputation (and his own) as just a far right arm of the Republicans, has sided with the "liberal" wing of the Court a few times.

The crisis of climate change has receded into the background, even as the whole world and the U.S. increases the burning of fossil fuels. As Greta Thunberg has warned, if this is not reversed soon, there will be dire consequences by 2030, and the end of civilization a possibility after that.

Climate change and other assaults on the environment are related to these other crises. A number of studies have shown that the continuing destruction of forests and the encroachment of humans on the habitats of wildlife increase the likelihood of animal to human transmission of diseases resulting in pandemics. Global warming is also disrupting animal habitats.

What ties these crises together is capitalism and the imperialism of the so-called advanced countries. The First World War marked the end of any overall progressive role for capitalism. Everything that has happened since further drives that lesson home. These current crises are part of that. If civilization (and possibly the human race itself) is to survive, capitalism must be overthrown and a new rational system begun to be built.

That system is communism, in the Marxist and not the Stalinist or Social Democratic sense.

Barry Sheppard
