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They didn't have to die: U.S. capitalism fails to contain COVID-19

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Ramsey Clark, right, and John Parker, left, with a Sudanese doctor at the site of the El Shifa pharmaceutical factory, destroyed by a U.S. cruise missile attack ordered by Bill Clinton in 1998. This was the largest medicine factory in Africa and could have produced many millions of vaccine doses.

Is there anyone who hasn't lost a loved one, friend, neighbor or co-worker to COVID-19? By the middle of September, one out of every 500 people in the United States had died of the coronavirus.

That means in an average little town of 10,000 people, 20 died and over 1,200 became ill, sometimes quite seriously. The number of deaths from COVID in the U.S. has probably equaled those who died in the 1918 influenza pandemic.

There's nothing equal about disease under capitalism. It wasn't inevitable that [one out of 35 people older than 85](#) in the U.S. died of COVID-19.

Former New York governor and maybe-not-so-former sexual predator Andrew Cuomo [shoved thousands of seniors with COVID-19](#) back into nursing homes. This helped kill the 13,000 residents who died there, as well as many nursing home workers.

Cuomo did this to free up space in hospitals, dozens of which were closed since the 1970s by capitalist cutbacks. Twenty thousand hospital beds were thrown away, according to the New York State Nurses Association.

Some of the closed hospitals, like St. John's in the Elmhurst neighborhood of Queens, were turned into luxury housing.

Last year Fox News and Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick were calling for grandma and grandpa to be thrown under the bus. Capitalists were demanding that the economy reopen even if more people would die.

Typical of their class was [California lawyer Scott McMillan](#). He tweeted: "The fundamental problem is whether we are going to tank the entire economy to save 2.5 percent of the population which is (1) generally expensive to maintain, and (2) not productive."

Seniors and disabled people are considered roadkill by banksters and billionaires. If you can't make profits for them anymore, you're fit for the scrap heap like an old piece of machinery.

Racism kills

Viruses don't discriminate, but capitalism does. In zip code 11369 — New York City's East Elmhurst neighborhood of Queens, where Malcolm X and his family lived — [one](#)

[out of every 129 people](#) have died of COVID.

That's as if 2.6 million people had died across the United States. Overcrowded housing and working in essential jobs without sufficient protection help fill the cemeteries and potter's fields.

At least [156 workers employed by New York's Metropolitan Transportation Authority](#) have died of the coronavirus. The overwhelming number of those who died belonged to Transport Workers Union Local 100.

These workers, who keep New York City's subways and buses moving, were told by the MTA last year not to wear masks. The MTA brass did so even though they had a stockpile of masks.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. declared in 1965 that "of all the forms of inequality, injustice in health is the most shocking and the most inhuman." The U.S. COVID-19 death rates for those aged between 40 and 65 years old are certainly shocking.

White people in that age bracket died at a rate of one out of every 1,300 people. That's bad enough.

Meanwhile, one out of every 240 similarly aged Indigenous people died. That's a death rate over five times higher.

Black and Latinx people [between ages 40 and 64](#) were also much more likely to perish. One out of every 390 Latinx people passed away, while so did one out of 480 Black people.

What's even more unequal are world vaccination rates against this killer disease. Despite Trump supporters urging people not to be jabbed, about 55 percent of the U.S population has been inoculated against COVID.

But [only four percent](#) of Africa's nearly 1.4 billion people have been vaccinated.

Pfizer, which makes the most widely used COVID vaccine, raked in profits of \$9.6 billion last year. Just in the first three months of 2021 it collected revenues of \$3.5 billion from its vaccine.

Yet the pharmaceutical giant has [donated less than 2%](#) of the 2.5 billion vaccine doses it made to Covax, an alliance that's trying to supply vaccines to Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The big drug outfits got President Bill Clinton to destroy the Al-Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Sudan with a cruise missile on Aug. 20, 1998. This was the largest medicine factory in Africa and could have produced many millions of vaccine doses.

Socialism vs. capitalism

Despite the best efforts of millions of healthcare workers — of whom [more than 3,600 have died](#) of COVID-19 — the U.S. medical-industrial complex has proven incapable of containing the pandemic. So has world capitalism.

The result is that the virus has been allowed to mutate into more virulent strains, like the Delta Variant. An average of 2,000 people are dying daily in the United States.

Just as capitalism is global, so are diseases. There's no such thing as a "pandemic in one country."

Karl Marx pointed out in "Capital" that capitalism in Europe arose from plundering Africa, Asia and the Americas. "Capital comes dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and dirt," wrote Marx, describing the African Holocaust and the Holocaust of Indigenous peoples in the Americas. Capitalism brought smallpox and measles to this hemisphere.

The COVID-19 variants are also affecting socialist countries and countries trying to break free from world capitalism. It was [Delta that led to a sharp increase](#) of COVID-19 cases in Cuba.

Cuba is fighting back. Before the 1959 revolution the country didn't even manufacture aspirin. Socialist Cuba has now [developed its own vaccines](#) against COVID-19 and plans to fully immunize 92.6 percent of its population by Nov. 15.

Cuba also plans to supply millions of vaccine doses to people around the world. It agreed to [supply the Socialist Republic of Vietnam](#) with 10 million doses.

The socialist People's Republic of China has [announced plans to distribute two billion doses](#) worldwide in 2021.

Zimbabwe has been punished with sanctions by the U.S. and Britain since 2000 because its farmland was returned to Africans from whom it was stolen. That's what should have happened to the plantations following the U.S. Civil War, with the land being given to Black and Indigenous people.

Despite the sanctions, Zimbabwe's people have fought back. Members of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) go through the entire country helping with necessary sanitation measures.

The result is that the African country of 15 million people had [an average 246 daily COVID-19 cases](#) as of Sept. 22.

Compare that to Pennsylvania, a state with [13 million people and 17 billionaires](#). Pennsylvania had a [daily average of 4,715 COVID-19 cases](#) on Sept. 22 — nearly 20 times the number in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe shows what can be done if people are organized. We need a socialist revolution to fight the next pandemic.

