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COVID-19 must not be the “new normal”

The global management consulting firm McKinsey & Company, one of the leading think tanks of US imperialism, released a new “Insights” article on October 28 in which it calls for the acceptance of COVID-19 as a permanent feature of a “new normal.” Dismissing scientific evidence that it is possible to stop the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the corporate strategists reject the policy of global elimination as too costly and, therefore, incompatible with business interests. McKinsey calls for society to adjust to mass deaths from COVID-19 as a “new normal.”

The report is titled, “Pandemic to endemic: How the world can learn to live with COVID-19.” On the day of its release, there were more than 426,000 new cases and at least 7,100 deaths worldwide, including an estimated 70,000 new cases in the United States and a further 1,200 confirmed deaths. In total, the world has suffered nearly 250 million known cases of the disease, with more than 15 million lives lost in just 22 months to the deadly contagion.



A child shovels dirt over a tree seedling planted with the remains of a family member who died from COVID-19, north of Bogota, Colombia, June 24, 2021. (AP Photo/Ivan Valencia, File)

The mass death statistics are barely referenced in the McKinsey report. Its five authors claim, falsely, that “zero COVID-19” is “very likely unachievable.” It presents the “highly transmissible nature of the Delta variant” as an insurmountable problem, because the costs of public health measures required to stop disease spread are too great. Therefore, McKinsey concludes, “[m]ost societies, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and much of Europe, will need to learn to live with COVID-19.” The virus must be accepted as “an ongoing part of the infectious-disease landscape, or endemic, as tuberculosis is today.”

The report trivializes the impact of the pandemic, noting that 38,000 Americans die in car accidents each year. It then remarks, with consummate cynicism, “But most of us don’t spend much time thinking about road safety. ... We get in the car, buckle up and go. Soon the daily risks we run with Covid-19 may seem as much a part of normal daily life as the risks we run as we put the car in drive or navigate flu season each winter.”

This is an absurd argument, and not only because the number of US road deaths last year was just 10 percent of COVID-19 fatalities. Car accidents and a global pandemic, which has a devastating long-term social impact, are profoundly different phenomena.

But to the extent that a comparison has any validity, it goes against the arguments of McKinsey. Even limited reform measures aimed at educating the public and forcing corporations to improve the quality of vehicles have brought about a dramatic lowering of fatal accidents. The motor vehicle death rate has fallen from 18.65 deaths for every 100 million miles driven in 1923 to 1.20 deaths per 100 million miles driven today.

The McKinsey report declares that “society will have to reach a consensus on what is an acceptable disease burden and use those targets to define an acceptable new normal.” Along these lines, there must be considerations “beyond death or severe disease ... As such, measures of workdays lost, business closures, and school-absenteeism rates should also be considered.”

When McKinsey refers to “society,” it is writing exclusively of the capitalist ruling class, not the working class that comprises the overwhelming mass of the world’s population. The report is not concerned with what is “realistic” in terms of saving lives, but what is needed to resume extracting surplus value from the working class. Speaking for the entire ruling elite, it asserts that too many resources have been spent combating the disease, resources that “society”—the financial-corporate oligarchy—are looking to recoup. The “new normal” will thus not be measured by the saving of lives, but solely by profit considerations.

The socially criminal character of the “new normal” envisaged by global capitalism is exposed in a research paper published last Saturday in *The Lancet*. Titled “The World Health Network: a global citizens’ initiative,” the paper was authored by 31 prominent scientists active in various fields combating COVID-19. In addition to the millions of deaths worldwide from COVID-19, the paper calls attention to the fact that the pandemic has “left millions of people with persistent symptoms (i.e., Long COVID), and has devastated societies.”

The Lancet paper makes clear that “[t]he tragedy is that much of this harm was preventable, as shown early on by many Asia-Pacific countries that pursued elimination of COVID-19.”

It continues: “Despite the manifest success of this approach, many governments rejected it outright, and after repeated lockdowns and substantial losses to life and economy, these

governments now speak of learning to live with the virus. Many governments' responses have been shaped by false dichotomies, pitting public health against the economy and collective well-being against individual liberty." The only way to save lives is for "global action to protect public health through progressive elimination of COVID-19."

This outlook is being advanced at the November 3 "World Health Network 2nd Global Summit to End Pandemics." Hundreds of epidemiologists, physicians and other experts from around the world will discuss how "to achieve elimination by assembling rigorous scientific evidence and guidelines" in order to ultimately end the pandemic.

The weakness of the event, however, is its social orientation. It seeks to expand its network of "advisory and advocacy teams" that have "advised governments and institutions" over the past two years on policies to end the pandemic. In other words, the success of fighting the pandemic, according to the summit, is predicated on the capitalists changing their ways. No mention is made of the working class, the broad mass of humanity, except tangentially when calling for "Zerocovid Spaces" to be built. One session, "Listening to Children on 'Back to School' in the Current Pandemic," even accepts as *fait accompli* that children and teachers should be back in schools.

Such sessions are a manifestation of the pressures mounting from the ruling elite to move away from any fight for an elimination strategy. As the McKinsey article makes clear, there will be no tolerance for such perspectives that stand in the way of profits. Those attending this summit must stand firm in their commitment to the near-term global elimination of SARS-CoV-2.

The public health measures that must be taken to stop the pandemic are well known to scientists. It is not a lack of knowledge that is the problem. In fact, the development of several anti-SARS-CoV-2 vaccines is, when deployed in conjunction with appropriate public health policies, a powerful weapon against the virus.

But the ending of the pandemic confronts its greatest obstacle in the intransigent opposition of the global capitalist class to the implementation of public health measures, no matter how critical they are, that undermine corporate profitability and the accumulation of vast personal wealth. The fight against COVID-19 must be waged not only on the medical front, but also—and above all—on the political and social fronts. For

in the final analysis, the ending of the COVID-19 scourge, like all the other dangers that threaten the lives of billions of people and even the survival of the planet, depends upon the struggle for workers' power on a global scale and the establishment of socialism.

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