

## Book Review

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**Mike Davis. *The Monster Enters: COVID-19 and the Plagues of Capitalism*. New York: OR Books, 2020. (205 Pages, Paperback ISBN 9781682193037)**

In *The Monster Enters* Mike Davis argues that we have allowed the monster of COVID-19 to enter in our countries without regard to the warnings given to us by numerous scholarly researches. In his earlier book *The Monster at Our Door* he had warned against the global threat of the avian flu. The present monster he says is scary, unpredictable and unseen. It lurks around while we slumber in our ignorance and greed for profits. He has been one of those small few scholars who have been warning about the dangers of global pandemics for decades. Davis has often warned about a potential viral catastrophe, which he thinks is getting ready in the toxic vat created by the combined dangers of global capitalist production, ecological devastation, and the intentional, politically-motivated neglect of public services the world over.

As coronavirus continues to spread, we are witnessing the grotesque depths to which our ruling class is willing to sink in order to promote their profits and maintain their privileges. On the other hand, the pandemic has illuminated the fact of matter that capitalist globalization is unsustainable for human biological life, especially in the absence of a truly international public health infrastructure. Therefore, he suggests that the people need to brace up for themselves and build an emancipated health-care system. Similarly they should sub-ordinate parochial nationalisms to global cooperation on public health as well as wind down hazardous agribusiness practices. Moreover, he suggests that the people need to wrest the control of antiviral and vaccine production from the private corporate pharmaceutical business.

According to Davis, if we look at the big picture of how vaccines are developed, we notice that most of the key researches lead to making of private profits and they are actually done on the

public money. For instance, four of the biggest pharmaceutical companies that are involved in the making of vaccines at the moment are not doing the real research. It is the small and medium size firms that are doing the actual research, including some universities. The big pharmaceutical companies later buy their work. So, for instance, the Big Pharma is basically a rent collection company based on holding patents and the exercise of immense political lobbying. On the other, the World Health Organization (WHO) is impelled to seek most of its budget from philanthropic organizations and pharmaceutical companies from the most powerful states.

Meanwhile, a decade ago statesmen in the US backtracked on their earlier health policies, which resulted in the outbreak of the Swine flu in 2009. They did not pay attention to making and stocking N-95 masks, ventilators, and PPEs rather let the already existing stockpile to deplete. Thus the country was left exposed to the pandemic and became vulnerable to the flu. It is also worth noticing that just 3 months ago the US axed funding of the PREDICT Program which was established in the Avian flu time (2005). While America lost control over the pandemic it is China and Cuba who are rising up to the challenge of providing significant medical aid and expertise to poorer countries. China had to face the H1N1 virus in 1997, which reproduced faster than ordinary flu strains and led to the destruction of 1.6 million live poultry in just Hong Kong region.

Davis argues that when budget cuts and forced termination of essential research and training programs are advised there takes place an obvious decline in preparedness and effectiveness of a country's first line of medical defence system. Second, the grant of patent monopolies to private sector firms results in inadequacy of preparation for the needs of pandemic prevention and mitigation. Third, Trump defunded a CDC-related program that monitored viruses present in wild and domestic animals, which could possibly cross over to humans. Earlier the Obama administration when confronted with Ebola had put a lot more investment in pandemics prevention programs and had expanded international surveillance. But Trump proceeded to dismantle most of the

networks that had been set up by the previous two governments and ignored all of the reports and warnings that were given to his administration. Fourth, there is absence of an international public health system that should have corresponded to the scale and impact of economic globalization. Davis suggests that if markets won't provide incentives to produce cost-effective drugs, then governments and non-profit organizations should take responsibility for their manufacture and distribution.

Finally Davis refers to Richard Horton who blames WHO for being subservient to corporate elites and censorship lobbies. Horton also blames the Bush administration for defending Big Pharma monopoly over drugs treatment of chronic disease and access to medical care to treat health emergencies. He says that there is rather more spending on weapons and defence and wars going on. Davis argues that there is a need to debate democratic models of effective response to prevent future pandemics. We should also put science in command and use resources for a comprehensive system of universal health coverage. Lastly, in order to prepare ourselves we need a grass root network that undertakes health care programs.

To sum it up, Mike Davis gives a clear and comprehensive picture of how the capitalist economy exacerbates a pandemic. The book is quite timely and relevant. It has enriched the literature on pandemics, plague and pestilence. Davis has aptly exposed the key roles played by agribusiness and the fast food industry. He has highlighted a capitalist global system going out of control to create ecological preconditions leading to a pandemic. The diversity of his interests are linked by his focus on global class relations and his writing is marked by a startling prescience. Being one of the foremost critical thinkers, he gives a brilliant account of the economy of pandemic.

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