Barcelona residents told to stay at home as COVID-19 resurges across Europe

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European Union (EU) states are facing a resurgence of COVID-19 outbreaks provoked by the criminal and negligent policies of the ruling class. Back-to-work policies, the lifting of confinement measures, continued lack of protection for the most vulnerable sections of the working class and the drive to reopen countries to tourism are leading to a collapse of social distancing. A new contagion threatens to swamp health systems yet again.

Fresh Covid-19 outbreaks have been detected throughout Europe. Sweden, Portugal and Bulgaria have some of the highest rates of new infections in the European Union, with an incidence rate of over 40 cases per 100,000 population according to data released on Saturday by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

In the past two weeks, Sweden reported 6,642 new infections and 208 deaths. Since the beginning of the outbreak in March the country has recorded more than 77,280 cases and 5,619 fatalities. Sweden is infamous for openly embracing the "herd immunity" policy—the same policy pursued by all governments—which means the abandonment of all efforts to stop the spread of the virus by allowing it to spread without constraint.

In Portugal, the 14-day infection rate is now at 47.9 with nearly 5,300 new cases reported in that period. An additional 95 people have also lost their lives to the virus. Lisbon's 700,000 residents have been in lockdown since July 1—expected to last until late July.

In France, the latest weekly bulletin from Santé Publique France has designated three départements—the north-western département of Mayenne and the overseas French territories of French Guinea and Mayotte—at an "elevated" level of concern. In several other areas including the Paris region and Nouvelle-Aquitaine, local authorities say they are monitoring cases. The average daily death rate has gone up to 22.4, a significant rise from the previous two weeks which saw a 14.8 and 15.5

daily death rate respectively. The total number of deaths during the outbreak now stands at 30,138.

In Belgium, the number of new infections per day continues to increase, with the daily average new cases reported for the week from 9 to 15 July rising above 200, to 207 from 124.7 new in the first seven days of July, an increase of 61 percent.

Spain currently seems to be the epicentre of the resurgence of the virus in Europe, a month after the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government ended the state of alarm, eased lockdown restrictions to struggle against the Covid-19 virus and forced millions of non-essential workers back to work. France is now discussing closing its borders once again to the Iberian Peninsula.

Spain was one of the hardest hit since the beginning of the year, with over 28,000 deaths recorded from COVID-19, although the National Institute of Statistics has stated that deaths overall in the country increased by 48,000 between March 2 and May 24, the weeks when the health crisis hit Spain the hardest.

Spain has at least 158 active coronavirus outbreaks, involving 1,993 people. The north-eastern Catalonia region has again recorded a daily COVID-19 infection figure of around 1,000, the worst of the outbreaks. The region's department of health announced yesterday night that the latest 24-hour figures record another 944 cases, nearly 700 of them in the Barcelona metropolitan area.

On Friday, the Catalan regional government announced last-minute new lock-down measures. Four million residents of the province of Barcelona have been urged to stay at home unless absolutely necessary. The Catalan government is banning gatherings of over 10 people and shutting cinemas, theatres and nightclubs, after the number of new cases tripled in a week.

The rapid rise in cases throughout Europe is the result of criminal policies which lifted confinement measures early

for the sake of profit. In China, the central government imposed a lockdown in Wuhan and other cities in Hubei province, the epicentre of the initial detected outbreak, in an effort to quarantine the virus from January 23 January to April 8. That is, the lockdown in China lasted two months, two weeks and two days. In many European states full lockdowns lasted only a few weeks, if they were ever implemented.

The concentration of EU governments was not protecting lives but protecting profits. To varying degrees, their initial response was to downplay the danger and keep businesses operating as usual. Once they were forced to due to mass anger and workers' strikes, some governments implemented lockdowns, only to ease them as soon as the number of cases went down.

Now, as European Union leaders discuss a €750 billion bailout plan as corporations shamelessly approve mass sackings, it is emerging that EU governments have not used this breathing spell to prepare for new outbreaks, even though they all predicted it would come. On Sunday, a study by *El País* said that Spain needs at least 12,000 contact-tracing officers, but instead only had 3,500. Helena Legido-Quigley, a health expert at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, told the daily "we have been insisting for months that we need to contract more tracers."

As anger mounts at the scale of the resurgence of the virus, the EU is working to limit the extent of localised lockdowns in order to continue extracting profits.

Speaking to the *Sunday Telegraph*, UK Prime Minister Boris Jonson compared a nationwide shutdown to a "nuclear deterrent," stating, "I can't abandon that tool any more than I would abandon a nuclear deterrent. But it is like a nuclear deterrent, I certainly don't want to use it. And nor do I think we will be in that position again." He was contradicting the UK's chief scientific adviser, Patrick Vallance, who warned that with winter coming, "The challenges will be very much greater and of course there is a risk that this could also need national measures as well."

In Germany, the states and the federal government reached an agreement on "more targeted measures." This means public authorities will only implement limited lockdowns in targeted hotspots and localised travels bans, to limit the impact on profits. The meeting came after recent lockdowns imposed following an outbreak at a slaughterhouse in the Gütersloh district. The restrictions have since been lifted.

On Thursday, Spain's King Felipe VI presided over an empty official tribute to essential workers and to the victims of the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was promoted for weeks by the ruling class in an attempt to prop up the popularity of the Monarchy, embroiled in multiple corruption scandals, and to present the pandemic as over and Spain as open to "business as usual," especially tourism.

More than 400 people—all the members of the government, each of Spain's 17 regional premiers, and even NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, World Health Organization chief Tedros Adanom Ghebreyesus and the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen—attended the ceremony.

The grotesque nature of the event has not only been exposed by the rise in cases in the past week, but also by protests and strikes of doctors, medical residents and other health care workers over low salaries and non-renewal of contracts in past weeks. Depressed and traumatised by their experience in the past months, they are now fearful of an insecure future: 36.3 percent of public health care workers not having a permanent contract. Regional governments have already started slashing health staff.

Last week, over 4,600 doctors, nurses, and pharmacy personnel began an indefinite strike to protest against low salaries. Marching through the streets, they received the support of the population, who applauded them from the balconies.

In the same week, the misnamed "progressive" Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government travelled to the EU summit to discuss corporate bailouts and billions of euros in EU austerity measures.