

For a general strike to halt the resurgence of COVID-19 in Europe!

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It is urgent to mobilize the working class across in Europe and internationally in a general strike to halt the ongoing resurgence of COVID-19. After the premature lifting of lockdowns imposed this spring, the drive by European governments to fully reopen schools, workplaces and public gathering places has paved the way for a devastating resurgence of the virus.

Initial protests have already broken out, with school occupations and strikes by doctors, port and airline workers across Greece, along with mass protests in Madrid. It is however in the nature of the virus, which ignores borders and has no need for a passport, that action against it cannot be local or national in form. Only the mobilization of the working class across Europe in an international general strike can halt the back-to-school and back-to-work drives launched by the European Union (EU), impose lockdowns to achieve social distancing, and prevent a horrific loss of life.

A resurgence of the virus already perceptible in July is now in full swing. In Spain, France and Britain, around 10,000 cases of COVID-19 are diagnosed every day, surpassing the figures recorded at the height of the pandemic in the spring—as is the case in the Czech Republic. In Turkey, where the pandemic is surging, the daily death toll has passed 70 for the first time since early May. In every major European country, the number of cases is growing rapidly.

State officials are well aware that this level of spread of the coronavirus threatens a massive loss of life. On Monday, British officials reported that the pandemic is doubling each week, with infections set to reach 50,000 per day in Britain by mid-October. After these 50,000 people passed through the incubation period, weeks later, hundreds or thousands would begin to die every day.

Such a scenario, where millions would be infected and many thousands would die each month in every major European country, is an imminent danger. Europe has already seen over 218,000 deaths from COVID-19. A March 18 German Interior Ministry report, published online this summer, noted that most scientists, “when asked what would happen if nothing is done, reply with a worst case scenario in which over 1 million die in 2020 in Germany alone.”

Yet European states have thrust aside the World Health Organization’s September 17 call to action as 300,000 new cases were diagnosed in Europe last week. Instead, they follow France’s banker-president Emmanuel Macron, who said France must “learn to live with the virus.” Limited local “restriction” measures adopted in Madrid and northern England do not stop work in non-essential industry or in-person learning in schools. These measures, which limit workers’ access to parks and to bars in the late evening, will not achieve social distancing or significantly slow infections.

On the contrary, governments across Europe are adopting measures to prosecute parents who refuse to bring their children to school and limit days workers can spend sheltering at home or taking care of children to their vacation days.

The fight workers face against COVID-19 is an international political struggle against the capitalist system and a policy of mass death deliberately pursued by the financial aristocracy. European officials have called for a policy of spreading COVID-19. In March, UK Chief Scientific Advisor Sir Patrick Vallance said, “It’s not possible to stop everyone getting it and it’s also *not desirable* because you want some immunity in the population to protect ourselves in the future.”

The case for death was bluntly made by the President of the German parliament Wolfgang Schäuble, who is infamous for his pursuit of EU austerity in Greece. Arguing in April for a return to work, he denounced the “terrible consequences” of lockdowns: “If there is one absolute value in our Constitution, then it is human dignity. It is sacrosanct. But that does not exclude us from having to die.”

Asked why his government had not acted more rapidly against COVID-19, he said: “The truth is we all hoped among ourselves that it wouldn’t get so bad.” This was, however, a lie. A month before, the Interior Ministry reported that inaction would lead to over a million deaths just in Germany.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a trigger event, starkly revealing the political issues facing the international working class. The EU, founded in 1992 after the Stalinist restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe and dissolution of the Soviet Union, is a brutal dictatorship of the banks. Built to consolidate the European imperialist powers’ global influence with an

aggressive commercial and military policy, it sought to deal ruthlessly with the working class, imposing market relations in the former Eastern Bloc while relentlessly slashing workers' living standards to the west.

The support of EU officials for the mass spread of a pandemic that is especially deadly among retirees cannot be separated from their decades-long drive to cut pension spending. A July report by the XPS Pensions Group consultancy in London noted that financial firms running pension schemes are "anxious for information on how COVID-19 will affect their scheme." The XPS Report found COVID-19 could "reduce pension scheme liabilities by up to £90 billion."

Bankers and finance ministry officials across Europe are doubtless calculating how the financial godsend of COVID-19 will kill retirees and thus drastically slash pension spending. Scientists have estimated that "herd immunity" would require 60-70 percent of the population to contract and become immune to COVID-19. A scientific study, titled "Assessing the potential impact of COVID-19 on life expectancy," calculated that if 70 percent of Europeans catch COVID-19, life expectancy would fall massively, likely by around 6.5 years but potentially up to 10.9 years.

Such a fall in life expectancy across Europe would let the banks re-direct hundreds of billions of euros each year to finance ongoing trillion-euro corporate bailouts and military spending increases, as the EU tries to develop an independent foreign policy from Washington. These motivations are discussed in the press. Noting the "geopolitical interests" involved in the back-to-work policy in April, *Der Spiegel* writes: "Corporate executives want to strengthen the European market to act as a counterweight to the economic power of China and the United States."

This involves a renewed onslaught against the living standards and fundamental social rights of the European working class. Millions have lost their jobs, unemployment benefits are being slashed for tens of millions of unemployed or underemployed workers across Europe, and economists estimate that the banks could destroy up to 59 million EU jobs during the capitalist crisis following the pandemic.

Internationally, social inequality is reaching levels incompatible with democratic forms of rule. In the United States, the Trump administration is declaring that it will not step down after the presidential elections, effectively turning the election into a coup. The European bourgeoisie is in the final analysis no less fascist than Trump. While handing over trillions of euros in public funds to the financial markets and the super-rich, it is preparing levels of mass infection and joblessness that only an authoritarian regime could try to impose on the workers.

The working class can stop the criminal policies of the ruling elites. It was a wave of spontaneous strikes at key auto, machining, and food-processing plants in Italy and across

Europe that imposed the initial lockdowns this spring.

This struggle can only proceed on an international basis, however, as a conscious political struggle independent from the union bureaucracies and allied "left populist" parties. The emerging protests among youth and workers raise the necessity of organizing independent workplace safety committees and compelling a rational, scientific fight against COVID-19. This policy cannot be negotiated with EU governments, however, but can only proceed via the struggle to organize general strikes aiming to bring these governments down and transfer power to the working class.

The union bureaucracies and their political allies are fully complicit in the back-to-school and back-to-work policies, which they are helping to implement while raising a few minor tactical criticisms. The German Union Federation (DGB) and France's main union federations explicitly signed a statement of support for the latest €750 billion EU bailout agreed by Berlin and Paris. The Spanish unions have mobilized no opposition to the EU's herd immunity policy, which their ally, the "left populist" Podemos party, is helping to implement in government.

There should be no complacency: the support of the unions and "left populist" parties for EU policy does not show that "herd immunity" is safe, but that they are bribed petty-bourgeois tools of the banks. They expect a cut of the billions in bailout payoffs passing through corporate management and works council offices.

Events have vindicated the warnings of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). Weeks before lockdowns were adopted in Europe, the ICFI called for a globally-coordinated emergency response to the pandemic, exposing the reactionary plans of governments in Berlin, London, Paris and across Europe and the world. It has worked with key sections of teachers, transport, and auto workers as they established independent workplace safety committees.

The European sections of the ICFI and its sympathizing group in Turkey reiterate the calls they have issued for a general strike against the murderous back-to-work and back-to-school policies. The task now facing the growing mobilization and political radicalization of the working class in Europe is the struggle to seize the resources stolen by the ruling class in years of obscene bailouts, bring down the EU governments, overthrow the capitalist system, and replace the reactionary EU with the United Socialist States of Europe.



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