

State of emergency declared in Madrid as COVID-19 resurgence sweeps Europe

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As COVID-19's resurgence sweeps Europe, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government was forced to declare a state of emergency in Madrid Friday. Over 600 cases per 100,000 residents had been recorded in the past seven days, over double the nationwide average of 250 per 100,000 residents.

The day before, a Madrid court had struck down the PSOE-Podemos government's proposed restrictions on travel and social contacts for over four million of Madrid's 6.6 million inhabitants. The restrictions, which the government can now enforce after declaring the state of emergency, have no impact on nonessential work and in-person teaching in schools, however. The PSOE-Podemos government's reckless drive to reopen the economy and schools at all costs has resulted in Spain emerging as currently the worst-impacted country in Western Europe.

As of Friday evening, Spain had recorded over 890,000 infections, and major papers have admitted that Spain's total losses from the disease are around 50,000. The surge of infections in Madrid is hitting a health care system that has been on the brink of collapse for weeks. As the WSWs previously reported, intensive care units were already running at 90 percent capacity in late September. Expecting a further deterioration of conditions in the hospitals, the Madrid regional government imposed a law this week banning all medical staff from talking to the media.

New daily infections across Europe Friday surpassed the mark of 100,000 for the second day running. Europe saw 102,357 new COVID-19 cases on Thursday and 110,051 on Friday, according to Worldometers. Since Tuesday, daily deaths across Europe have hovered around the 1,000 mark.

Europe is re-emerging as a major centre of the pandemic. Europe recorded 460,000 COVID-19 cases

last week, compared to 380,000 for North America and South America, according to Britain's *Daily Telegraph*.

Alongside Spain, France is witnessing the most rapid rise in new infections. Over 18,000 cases are being reported each day, and hospital wards are filling up with COVID-19 patients. The maximum alert level was decreed in Lille, Lyon, Grenoble, and Saint Étienne, after being decreed in Paris, Marseille and Aix. This entails the closure of bars and indoor sports venues, while restaurants are allowed to remain open under tighter restrictions.

However, the government of investment banker Emmanuel Macron has explicitly ruled out adopting a second lockdown, regardless of the toll in deaths. Health Minister Olivier Véran became the latest official to denounce calls for a lockdown to curb infections, and positively encouraged French residents to go on holiday within the country. Noting that the virus has now spread across all of France, he cynically remarked, "Travel from one zone to the other would not therefore bring the virus to a location where it is not already present today."

Macron's homicidal response to the pandemic, which is aimed at protecting the profits of big business and has pushed the death toll above 30,000, is provoking growing popular anger. A recent poll found that 61 percent of respondents were dissatisfied with the government's handling of the pandemic; 72 percent said they would support a second lockdown to contain the virus.

Germany, long held up as one of the countries that coped best with the pandemic due to its comparatively low number of infections, also saw a dramatic spike in cases in the past week. The Robert Koch Institute, Germany's main public health agency, reported 4,058 new infections over the previous 24 hours on Thursday

morning. This was more than 1,200 higher than the 2,828 reported on Wednesday, which at the time was the highest daily increase since April. Friday saw yet another increase, with 4,516 new infections reported.

The virus is running rampant in large cities in particular, where workers live in close quarters and cannot avoid extensive social contact due to the ruling elite's reckless reopening of the economy. Berlin, Frankfurt and Bremen have all surpassed 50 infections per 100,000 inhabitants over the past seven days—a level beyond which public health officials recommend adopting strict containment measures to prevent an exponential growth of infections.

But Germany's political establishment, from Chancellor Angela Merkel's right-wing Christian Democrats to the Left Party, is doubling down on its criminal drive to keep the economy and schools open.

After a video conference Friday with mayors from Germany's 11 largest cities, Merkel sought to blame the population at large for the spread of the virus. She demanded that cities restrict private gatherings and ban alcohol in public places if more than 50 infections per 100,000 residents are recorded within seven days. Absolutely no restrictions were unveiled for the operations of big business or in schools, however, which are rapidly emerging as hot spots for new outbreaks.

Merkel said her top priority was not "to restrict economic and social life as earlier in the year." Governments at all levels have agreed to let the virus rip through workplaces and schools so that the major corporations and banks can continue raking in profits and the stock market can keep rising.

In Britain, a study published by Imperial College London Friday estimated that up to 45,000 people are being infected by the virus each day. Even according to official figures which do not even come close to capturing the true scale of infections, due above all to a collapse in testing, close to 14,000 new cases and over 80 deaths were registered Friday. Illustrating the uncontrolled spread of the virus, an Office of National Statistics survey found that an estimated 224,000 people had the virus during the week of 25 September-1 October, compared to 116,000 for the previous week.

Italy, initially the worst-hit country in Europe in February-March, saw an explosive growth in infections

this week. It reported over 5,000 new infections Friday, up from 3,600 on Thursday.

Stressing his determination to avert a second lockdown, Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte said masks must be worn in all outdoor public places where social distancing cannot be maintained. Italy's lockdown during the first wave of the pandemic, when well over 30,000 COVID-19 deaths were recorded in the country, was imposed only after workers launched wildcat strikes in factories nationwide that then spread across Europe.

Across Eastern Europe, COVID-19 is spreading at an alarming rate. After the Czech Republic declared a state of emergency this week, new infections rose above 5,000 Friday. In neighbouring Slovakia, the government called in the military Friday to support overwhelmed health care systems in Slovak cities. Poland (4,700), Ukraine (5,804), and Bulgaria (516) all hit daily infection records.

The devastating resurgence of the pandemic across Europe, which threatens to claim hundreds of thousands of lives over the coming months, confirms the repeated warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* about the criminal drive by ruling elites to prematurely reopen the economy. This policy of deliberately provoking mass death is bound up with the protection of the wealth of the super-rich. It can be halted only by an international struggle led by the working class.

As the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its sympathising Turkish group noted in its recent statement, "For a general strike to halt the resurgence of COVID-19 in Europe": "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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