

Macron hails herd immunity, rejects lockdown as COVID-19 surges in Europe

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In a television interview yesterday amid the European-wide resurgence of COVID-19, French President Emmanuel Macron announced a 9 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew in several French cities, while insisting there would be no lockdown to halt the virus. However, a curfew will not stop the virus, which is now infecting 20,000 people daily in France and over 130,000 across Europe.

An even greater disaster is looming. The number of cases is growing exponentially, and in France emergency rooms are already overflowing with serious cases in Paris, Marseille and other cities. In late September, the president of the Doctors Association, Patrick Brouet, warned: “If nothing changes, in 3-4 weeks, France will have to face in long autumn and winter months a full-fledged epidemic across its entire territory, with no less-affected regions whose health staff can help worst-hit regions, and with a health system that will be overrun.”

Macron, who infamously said that “we must learn to live with the virus,” said, however, that nothing would change and that “we have not lost control.” He added that he is “not in panic mode.” He announced a curfew beginning on the night of Friday to Saturday in the Paris area, Aix-Marseille, Lyon, Lille, Toulouse, Saint-Étienne, Rouen, Grenoble and Montpellier. “It would be premature to lock down the country at this stage,” he said.

He insisted that all workers would return to work, and students to school, despite the curfew. The goal, he explained, is to “limit our more festive relations,” but to keep the economy going and, according to him, “continue having a social life,” but only at work and at school. He also declared that current precautions against the virus are doing a satisfactory job in limiting transmission in workplaces and in schools and universities.

Macron, a banker and shameless representative of the financial aristocracy, is planning to sacrifice large numbers of lives to keep workers at work, even at non-essential jobs, to guarantee profits keep flowing to the banks. Macron’s policy, closely coordinated with the European Union (EU), London and Washington, is based entirely on lies and reactionary evasions that are directly contradicted by the data of his own ministries.

A curfew that simply aims to limit French people’s social lives after work will not halt the pandemic. According to the latest French Public Health Agency report, the percentage of clusters due to public or private gatherings has fallen sharply as workers limit their social contacts, to only 7.9 percent of the total. Schools, companies, precarious jobs, and mass transit count for 61 percent of COVID-19 clusters, the rest being concentrated mainly in hospitals and social services facilities.

Schools and universities alone account for over 35 percent of clusters, underscoring the significance of the politically-criminal decision to restart in-person learning this autumn.

Not only is Macron’s statement that existing safety measures are stopping contagion at work and at school false, but the curfew will do little or nothing to halt most of the transmission of COVID-19. His claim that it is “premature” to lock down the country reflects above all the utter contempt of the financial aristocracy for the lives of working people.

Macron said he aimed to bring the number of daily new cases in France down from 20,000 to between 3,000 and 5,000. The journalists carrying out this entirely scripted interview, news anchormen Gilles Bouleau of TF1 and Anne-Sophie Lapix of France2, asked no questions that could have revealed that Macron’s curfew is not likely to reach this goal.

But above all, Macron's statement that the goal of his policy is to let between 90,000 and 150,000 people contract a potentially deadly virus each month is irresponsible and politically criminal.

Macron admitted that even when those who are sick do not die, they suffer consequences "that we do not understand," they have "lost the sense of smell and taste" or "have lesions in their lungs, sometimes consequences on their cardiac, gastrointestinal or nervous systems." He also admitted that half of the sick on life-support are under 65. Nonetheless, he accepted that for the indefinite future, people in France could be infected at a rate of millions of cases each year.

Fighting this policy requires the independent political mobilization of the working class. Macron's policy is a conscious, cold-blooded policy, deliberately aiming to pump profits into the banks at the expense of millions of people across France, Europe and the world. While Berlin, Paris and the EU have agreed on multi-trillion-euro bailouts to fund the banks and major corporations and boost the stock portfolios of the super-rich, they are working closely with the unions to return workers to work and guarantee a flow of profits to the ruling class.

Significantly, in his speech, Macron hailed the pandemic policy of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government, the most open defender together with Donald Trump of a herd immunity policy. This strategy for immunizing livestock entails vaccinating a certain percentage of a herd in order to ensure that a disease will not spread far among the livestock. Now, treating workers and youth as worth less than cattle, Macron, Johnson, Trump and other NATO heads of state are proposing to let millions contract a deadly disease.

The central issue in fighting COVID-19 is allocating the necessary financial and industrial resources to fund workers and small businesses during a lockdown to halt the spread of the virus, while investing massively in testing and treatment facilities. However, the American and European financial aristocracies obstinately refuse any such policy.

As criticisms of Macron grow in the medical community, several reports have emerged contrasting the policy of China's Stalinist police state to that of the EU, which was both less effective and less humane. Lockdowns have largely halted the spread of COVID-19 inside China. When a 12-case cluster was

detected in Qingdao this month, around a hospital treating foreign COVID-19 patients, authorities rapidly moved to test the city's 9 million inhabitants in order to identify the infected, let them shelter at home, and prevent a wider outbreak.

In France and other wealthy EU countries, however, the state accepts a mass spread of the virus, and even with only a few hundreds of thousands of tests being carried out, workers still have to wait several days or even over a week to obtain the test results.

The Clermont-Ferrand daily *La Montagne* interviewed Dr Philippe Klein, a French doctor now practicing in China, who stressed that there is an imminent danger of a catastrophic collapse of the European health system in the winter, when lung diseases are most deadly. He said, "A time will come where our emergency rooms and life-support systems will be saturated, and we will again have to pick and choose which of the ill will be treated. There will have to be a lockdown."

Klein bitterly criticized Macron's handling of the pandemic in the interests of the super-rich: "A lockdown is easy. Stop everything, stop the mixing of the population and stop the spread. But in France we botched the end of the lockdown." Klein said he spoke to Macron and suggested more rigorous shelter-at-home orders as in China. However, Klein said, "Macron listened, it was just that economic interests won out. Those who wanted to slow [the pandemic] down, not stop it, made the wrong choice."

The central question now is organizing workers and youth in independent safety committees in their workplaces and schools, independently of the unions, and laying the political basis for systematic mass strikes and opposition to the policy of Macron, the EU and the capitalist class. This includes the fight to implement a shelter-at-home policy for youth and non-essential workers to prevent an avoidable but truly horrific loss of life in Europe and internationally in the coming months.



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