

Mobilize the working class against the European Union's “herd immunity” policies!

Alex Lantier
17 October 2020

This week, the World Health Organization warned that Europe is facing “exponential increases” in COVID-19 cases. In just the past 10 days, the continent has recorded over one million new cases, bringing the total since the start of the pandemic to over seven million.

As Europe emerges as an epicenter of a global resurgence of COVID-19, the European Union is pursuing a policy leading to deaths on an unprecedented scale, far surpassing the 200,000 deaths this spring.

After lockdowns reversed the initial surge of COVID-19 in Europe, governments across the continent boasted that they had controlled the virus. Europe's central banks handed out bailouts of €1.25 trillion for the euro zone and £645 billion for Britain, and the EU negotiated a €750 billion corporate bailout. At the same time, European governments demanded that workers return to work and youth to school. The priority, they insisted, was avoiding a new lockdown.

All these arguments stand completely exposed. The number of daily new cases in Europe has surged past 150,000 as the virus explodes out of control. France is declaring over 30,000, Britain nearly 20,000, the Czech Republic nearly 10,000, Italy 9,000, Belgium, Poland and the Netherlands 8,000 and Germany 7,000. Authorities report 13,000 new cases daily in Spain, until recently Europe's worst-hit country, but newspapers are reporting that regional governments are cutting thousands of cases out of their totals.

Even if the contagion were to remain at its current levels, at 4.5 million cases per month, it would overwhelm Europe's health care system. However, EU governments continue to reject a general shelter-at-home or lockdown order—demanding instead that non-essential workers go back to work so as to produce profits to back the massive amounts of financial capital being handed over to major corporations. The EU has sacrificed workers' health and lives to the profits of the financial

aristocracy.

Officials in Spain, Britain and France are announcing late-night curfews or restrictions on mobility in selected cities in an attempt to reassure an increasingly angry and fearful public. From Madrid to Marseille, Paris and Liverpool, however, these curfews have one thing in common: they force workers and youth to keep going to work and school, where the vast majority of infections take place. With this policy, the number of new cases will keep rising exponentially.

As the northern hemisphere heads into winter—the season when people stay inside in poorly ventilated areas and diseases like COVID-19 spread and kill the most rapidly—a disaster is looming in Europe and around the world.

The worst can be averted only via the political mobilization of the European and international working class. Indeed, it was only the independent intervention of the working class that compelled the adoption of lockdown policies this spring in Europe, which epidemiologists estimate saved the lives of millions. Wildcat strikes starting at Fiat's Pomigliano auto plant and spreading to steel, engineering and food processing plants in Italy and much of Europe shut down international supply chains and forced EU governments to adopt shelter-at-home orders.

After over one million COVID-19 deaths worldwide, including over 230,000 in Europe, explosive social opposition is building. Mass youth protests have erupted against back-to-school policies in Greece and Poland, as well as strikes by nurses in Spain and France demanding more resources and better pay to deal with the pandemic. Health workers and professionals are denouncing the “herd immunity” policies adopted by governments around the world, which Britain's internationally recognized medical journal, the *Lancet*, subjected to devastating and unambiguous criticism.

The *Lancet* wrote, “The arrival of a second wave and thousands of deaths. However, these warnings were the realisation of the challenges ahead has led to renewed interest in a so-called herd immunity approach, which suggests allowing a large uncontrolled outbreak in the low-risk population while protecting the vulnerable. Proponents suggest this would lead to the development of infection-acquired population immunity in the low-risk population, which will eventually protect the vulnerable. This is a dangerous fallacy unsupported by scientific evidence.”

“Uncontrolled transmission in younger people risks significant morbidity and mortality across the whole population,” the *Lancet* warned. It added that this threatens to “overwhelm the ability of health care systems to provide acute and routine care,” would ensure “recurrent epidemics,” and “risks further exacerbating the socioeconomic inequities... already laid bare by the pandemic.”

The *Lancet* wrote that the stay-at-home measures carried out earlier in the year were “essential to reduce mortality, prevent health care services from being overwhelmed, and buy time to set up pandemic response systems to suppress transmission following lock-down.”

Seven months after lock-downs began across Europe this spring, there is no longer any question that the closure of non-essential businesses, combined with massive investments in public health, testing, quarantining and contact tracing are the only scientific policy to combat the virus. What remains to be clarified is the political program on which the growing opposition in the working class can be turned in a conscious struggle to avert a truly horrific loss of life. A scientific policy can be implemented only through the international unification and mobilization of the working class in a struggle for socialism.

Only a massive, revolutionary assault on capitalist property can overcome the entrenched economic interests that have dictated a murderous policy on COVID-19. The inescapable conclusion of the *Lancet*’s article is that EU governments’ back-to-work, back-to-school policy was a false, anti-scientific policy, foisted on workers and youth by the financial aristocracy based on lies.

EU officials knew their policies would lead to mass deaths. In March, as strikes forced officials to agree to lock-downs, the German Interior Ministry prepared a classified report that “over 1 million” Germans could die in 2020 of COVID-19 without emergency measures. Officials at a French National Security Council meeting reportedly heard top-secret warnings of hundreds of

thousands of deaths. However, these warnings were hidden from the population and buried by the media, so that EU banks and governments could push workers back to work and restart the flow of profits.

Europe’s trade union bureaucracies and allied middle class parties, like Germany’s Left Party, Podemos in Spain and France’s New Anti-capitalist Party, are implicated in this criminal policy. After doing nothing to mobilize workers this spring, they helped implement the back-to-work policy. After the German and French unions signed a statement this summer endorsing EU bailouts, they expect that billions in bailout funds will pass through banks and works councils into their stock portfolios and union coffers, and are leaving thousands or millions of workers to die.

The sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) have called for workers and youth to organize safety committees in workplaces and schools, independently of the unions, to oppose the herd immunity policies of the ruling class. As the virus tears through the population, it is clear that defending health and safety in individual workplaces or schools is impossible without a collective, revolutionary strategy to oppose the financial aristocracy’s policy of mass infection and death.

This requires building the ICFI as the revolutionary leadership in the international working class, to lay the political basis for mass, coordinated strike actions, systematic opposition and the taking of power to impound the necessary resources for a scientific and humane fight against COVID-19. This includes a shelter-at-home policy for youth and all non-essential workers, backed by financing for workers and small businesses no longer able to operate. It demands a revolutionary struggle by the working class to bring down the EU and replace it with the United Socialist States of Europe.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact