

COVID-19 pandemic surges in Turkey as government continues to hide data

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The COVID-19 pandemic resurgence in Turkey is intensifying due to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's back-to-work and back-to-school drive, supported by the bourgeois opposition parties and their allies in the trade unions. Turkey has recorded 1,815 more coronavirus cases and 72 more people died on Sunday. This brought the total to nearly 350,000 cases and more than 9,200 deaths.

With 1,812 new patients on Friday, Turkey had seen a record number of new cases since early May. However, President Erdoğan's government acknowledged in early October that it has lied about and downplayed the COVID-19 pandemic in Turkey, effectively imposing a "herd immunity" policy in the interests of the Turkish ruling class by making an arbitrary, unscientific distinction between "cases" and "patients."

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), a COVID-19 case is "A person with laboratory confirmation of COVID-19 infection, irrespective of clinical signs and symptoms." However, Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca declared that "Not all cases are patients, because there are those who show no symptoms at all even though their tests come back positive." According to a journalist who spoke with Koca after his statement, the real daily number of cases is 8 or 10 times more than the number of patients announced.

The Turkish Medical Association (TTB) has recently declared that the government might not have reported more than 81,000 COVID-19 cases in April and 275,000 cases in September, according to the rate of positive tests announced by Koca. This would put Turkey in fourth place, just after France, in terms of the total number of cases in Europe.

Moreover, according to Koca, more than 40,000

health care workers have been infected and 107 of them have died. He added that the number of cases in Istanbul has increased 50 percent in last month, and that there is a "rising trend" in infections across the country.

Though the pandemic is erupting out of control, with the number of patients and the death toll rising rapidly, the back-to-school campaign was intensified on last Monday, as millions more students were forced back into in-person teaching.

Previously, Education Minister Ziya Selçuk had announced: "On Monday, October 12, we are opening all primary schools, village schools, 8th and 12th grades and the schools of our special needs kids." In addition, all classes have been opened in Vocational and Technical High Schools.

A total of more than 10 million students have begun in-person teaching, including in pre-schools, primary schools and vocational high schools. President Erdoğan has declared that his government plans to re-open universities soon, despite widespread opposition among university students to such a move. After Erdoğan made his statement on the universities, tens of thousands of youth expressed their opposition on social media with a hashtag "We want online teaching."

Students have rightly stated that this re-opening drive of universities did not stem from concerns about education, but of keeping the economy running and profits flowing amid a pandemic. There is also a developing movement among working class youth against student loans, demanding debt cancellation. More than 5 million youth have student loan debt; nearly 280,000 of them have been sent to the bailiffs for this reason.

Health Minister Koca recently said: "We see that there is no increase in the number of positive cases in

the re-opening of schools. We even know that there are partial decreases compared to those that do not open.” This absurd statement, which is not based on any scientific analysis or research, indicates that the government will insist upon in-person teaching and a “herd immunity” policy at the expense of the lives of students, teachers and thousands more people.

Indeed, at least three students and two teachers in a school in the northern city of Samsun tested positive this week, and 240 students were quarantined.

A teacher and student in the Fatsa district of Ordu province have caught the coronavirus and the 30-person class was quarantined.

The government continues to implement this policy based on incorrect data, while refusing any demands for lockdowns and suppressing growing opposition within the working class, which is forced to go back to work amid a raging pandemic.

Since the pandemic began, millions of workers have been forced to take unpaid leave and survive on only 1,170 liras (125 euro) monthly in unemployment insurance. With the votes of the bourgeois opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), the Erdoğan government extended the forced “unpaid leave” process, meaning hunger conditions until July 2021 for hundreds of thousands or millions of workers. While Turkey’s minimum wage is about 2,300 liras (€247), a family of four goes hungry on anything less than 2,400 liras (€258) per month.

Under these conditions, fearing that any protest could quickly trigger a social explosion, the government is trying to suppress any signs of social opposition. On Wednesday, police attacked Health and Safety Labor Watch (HSLW) activists who tried to issue a press statement on the COVID-19 pandemic in front of a hospital in the capital, Ankara. Police detained eight members of the group, including health workers.

In a report the group subsequently published online, they said: “As we have insistently stated since the first days of the outbreak, it has step by step transformed into a working class disease with the policies that have been carried out in this period.” The statement calls on all workers to form “pandemic committees” at workplaces against workplace homicides, the pandemic, unemployment, hunger and precarious employment.

This call for “pandemic committees” reflects growing

anger and disillusionment with the trade unions’ reactionary collaboration with the ruling class on the pandemic, and the growing political influence of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS). The campaign for rank-and-file safety committees now unfolding internationally only offers a way forward against the capitalist policy of death, as the WSWS has explained, if it is based on an international, socialist perspective completely independent of the trade unions and established parties. The only political tendency fighting for such a perspective is the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).



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