

The policy of “herd immunity” pushes Europe’s health care system toward the abyss

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The limited measures announced by various European governments following record numbers of new coronavirus cases in multiple countries over the weekend cannot hide the disaster caused by their premature policy of resuming work and reopening schools.

On Sunday, records were broken in Italy, France and Germany. There were 21,273 cases of COVID-19 detected in Italy. According to data reported by the Robert Koch Institute (RKI) for Infectious Diseases, there were 11,176 more cases in Germany than the day before. France recorded 52,010 cases, up from 45,000 the day before.

In France, the milestone of one million cases since the beginning of the pandemic has been passed. The number of deaths attributable to the disease reached 116 on Sunday, bringing the total number of deaths since the beginning of the epidemic to 34,761. The test positivity rate continues to rise, reaching 17 percent, up from 16 percent the day before, and only 4.5 percent in early September.

Spain reported more than 52,000 new cases this weekend, and a cumulative total of 361.7 cases per 100,000 inhabitants diagnosed in the last 14 days. Confirmed cases are increasing across the peninsula and the Balearic Islands. On Friday, 231 additional deaths were recorded, bringing the official death toll to 34,752. The real figure, according to the Spanish press, is more than 55,000 deaths.

The World Health Organization (WHO) announced on Saturday that it had recorded a new world record of coronavirus infections for the third consecutive day, with the Northern Hemisphere being particularly affected. According to WHO world statistics, 465,319 cases were confirmed on Saturday, compared to 449,720 on Friday and 437,247 on Thursday.

Faced with the chaotic health situation in Europe, measures have been taken in several countries. Italy will close cinemas, theaters, gyms and swimming pools, while bars and restaurants will stop serving after 6 p.m. One of the most affected countries, Belgium, moved its curfew forward to 10 p.m. Cultural and sports activities have been banned since Monday.

In Spain, where some 4,500 classrooms, or 1.3 percent of the total, are in quarantine, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez has imposed a curfew throughout the country, except the Canary Islands. A state of health emergency has been declared.

In a speech after meeting with his cabinet, Sanchez said: “The reality is that Europe and Spain are immersed in a second wave of the pandemic. The situation we are living through is extreme.” However, Sanchez still ruled out new containment measures. “There will be no home confinement in this state of emergency, but the longer we stay at home, the safer we will be,” he said. “Everyone knows what to do.”

“We know that there are many epidemics in the social sphere, but I doubt that most of them are at night, especially after midnight,” Pedro Gullon, of the Spanish Society of Epidemiology, said, mocking the late night curfew in Spain as in many other countries.

Gullon proposed instead a lockdown and to make working from home compulsory where possible. Under these conditions, he explained, “a lot of mobility is avoided, from when people have to take public transport,” limiting transmission of the virus.

In France, local and national lockdowns are still being discussed within the government, according to a statement on Sunday by Cédric O, the junior minister for digital economy. Speaking on France Info, O replied to a question about a possible reconfinement by stating: “Everything is possible.” Macron is holding

two meetings of the defense council today and tomorrow to discuss the response to the pandemic.

While the current acceleration of the pandemic is ravaging the continent, O simply said: “We must not rule out anything and see what to do according to the evolution of the epidemic.”

In fact, for weeks Macron has been acting like Nero while France burns. A disaster threatens the whole of Europe. More than a third of intensive care unit beds in France—and more than 68 percent in the Ile-de-France region surrounding Paris—are occupied by COVID-19 patients. The number of patients is doubling approximately every ten days. Even if a strict and widespread lockdown were imposed immediately, the number of patients would continue to rise for several weeks, overwhelming hospitals.

An intensive care unit doctor told the *Parisian*: “There are 15 patients in the corridors, we don’t know where to put them. We are on duty until 4 a.m. If we continue like this, we’re going to crash. When we discovered the headline of *Les Echos* where the minister said that the hospital is stronger than in the spring, we choked. We were horrified!”

The gains from the lockdowns imposed in March by the European states have now been lost. Strict containment measures were implemented against the ruling elite’s wishes in the face of a series of wildcat strikes that had brought Italian industry to a standstill and were spreading throughout Europe. Having imposed a premature return to work and school and removed restrictions, the ruling class has caused a rebound in the contagion that threatens millions of lives in Europe.

The opposition of governments and banks to new lockdowns reveals their complete disregard for the lives at risk. Leaders have resorted to curfews and other more or less performative measures mainly out of fear of an eruption of social anger that is rising across the board against the policy of “living with the virus.” The pandemic and the hundreds of thousands of deaths have exposed the bankruptcy of the financial aristocracy and their inability to protect human lives.

This criminal policy was possible with the complicity of the trade unions and their “left-wing populist” political allies, who negotiated the disastrous policy of a return to work and reopening of schools. These forces were not only propagandists of the policy of herd

immunity. They implemented it.

In Spain, one of the countries most affected by the pandemic, the government is an alliance between social democracy and the “left-wing populists” of Podemos. This party has implemented the EU’s herd immunity policy and supported during the summer the dispatch of police to the confined working class neighborhoods of Madrid. Now that the health situation in Spain is once again a disaster, the government to which Podemos belongs refuses to take measures to control the virus in order to continue extracting profits for the banks on the backs of the workers.

These events vindicate the call by the International Committee of the Fourth International for workers to form their own health and safety committees, independent of the unions, in schools and workplaces. These committees would ensure to protect essential workers from the virus, and to prepare a workers’ struggle to impose lockdowns, the only effective method capable of controlling the spread of the deadly virus.

Workers in non-essential sectors and young people must be allowed to stay home, and the thousands of billions of euros from stimulus plans must be used not to bail out the banks but to allow workers to shelter in place with no loss of income. For this the socialist expropriation of the financial aristocracy is necessary. This means a struggle for the seizure of power by the European working class and the reorganization of society according to the needs of humanity.



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