

Over 850 dead in 24 hours

After delayed and inadequate lockdown measures, COVID-19 second wave overwhelms France

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With the Macron administration's latest coronavirus lockdown measures that are both inadequate and too late, epidemiologists now predict a second wave of the pandemic in France even larger than the first. But the Macron government is determined to maintain economic activity, with no regard for the safety of the population.

The disastrous and criminal impact of these policies can already be seen in the accelerating death toll in France. On Tuesday alone, 854 people died from the virus, the highest number since April, and up from 416 the day before.

In an October 28 speech announcing partial lockdown measures, Macron emphasized the European character of the second wave of the pandemic in order to minimize his government's responsibility. "We are all, in Europe, surprised by the evolution of the virus," he said. It is as though the continent's population was bound to a fate independent of any of the actions taken by governments, which, according to Macron, have all been made on the basis of the best available information.

This is a clear lie, since a renewed upsurge of the pandemic was noted weeks ago by epidemiologists. But nothing has been done. If the upsurge is now taking place across the continent, it is because every European government has followed essentially the same policy of returning the population to work at all costs.

As the virus began to accelerate rapidly, Macron announced curfews in some regions on October 14. Not only did these measures fail to stem the spread of the virus, but it accelerated from a 38 percent increase from

October 12 to 18 to an additional 52 percent the following week.

Revealing his contempt for the safety of workers and the social interests standing behind his policies, Macron criticized working from home as harmful to the functioning of business.

The government's policies are dictated by its willingness to tolerate catastrophic levels of death. Speaking on October 28, Macron warned that without a new lockdown, "In a few months we will have to mourn at least another 400,000 deaths." He added that "even if we could open many more beds, and despite our doubling of capacity, who would seriously want thousands of our compatriots to spend weeks in intensive care with the medical consequences that this entails?"

Yet that is precisely what Macron has done. The government has allowed cases to increase rapidly, only taking responsive measures when the hospital system and intensive care units were already on the verge of being overwhelmed. It is not humanitarian concerns that led him to announce these measures, but fear of a working-class upsurge bringing down his government.

"At this stage, we know that whatever we do, nearly 9,000 patients will be in intensive care by mid-November, almost all of France's capacity," Macron said. It is unclear what data Macron was basing this on, since the scenarios discussed by the scientific council and referred to in government defence counsel meetings are kept secret.

Since Macron's speech, two possible scenarios developed by the Pasteur Institute for the evolution of

the pandemic have been referred to in the media. The first foresees “only” 5,400 to 6,020 patients in intensive care on November 15, compared to 7,148 reached at the last peak on April 8. But this assumes that the confinement policies are as effective as those implemented in the spring.

If the current measures are now less effective, the Pasteur Institute predicts the number of patients in intubation to exceed 6,600 (between 6,300 and 7,050) by mid-November, with a peak between 8,200 and 9,100 several weeks later.

The recently announced lockdown measures are very limited. To keep the economy open, and ensure that corporate profits are not damaged, millions more workers are being kept on the job than during the first lockdown. Only businesses that accept customers in person, including in retail and hospitality, must close. Twelve million students are also continuing to attend school, not—as the government cynically asserts—because the well-being and education of the youth are a priority—but to ensure that workers who would otherwise be minding their children are not removed from the labour force.

Schools with overcrowded and poorly ventilated classrooms are particularly conducive to the spread of the virus. Studies show that children over the age of 10–11 are as contagious as adults. There is great uncertainty about the contagiousness of younger children, but even serious studies showing a high risk for young children have been ruled out by the government.

The available data on school contaminations are incredibly sparse. For example, the Public Health France website provides a list of clusters in schools and universities without breaking them down by age group or establishment. It would be simple with current technology to provide mappings of outbreaks in schools and other institutions. This essential information for fighting the epidemic is kept hidden.

The situation is moving towards the most catastrophic scenario, with an overflow of the hospital system that will last longer than in the spring, with a very high mortality linked to COVID-19 and a significant excess mortality for other pathologies that cannot be properly managed for several weeks.

Macron can only carry out this criminal policy because he does not face any serious political

opposition. All the establishment parties represent the interests of the capitalist class and have supported the return to work and the reopening of the school system. The trade union apparatuses have also supported the return to work, presenting themselves and acting as reliable partners and advisers to business and the state.

The pseudo-left parties such as the New Anti-capitalist Party did not organize any opposition to the economic reopening. They sought to confuse the issue by demanding only additional resources for the health and education system, to facilitate a reopening. But such measures, even assuming they were accepted by Macron, would not have solved the health situation.

The Socialist Equality Party, founded in 2016 as the French section of the world Trotskyist movement, the International Committee of the Fourth International, defends the interests of the working class. Our parties are the only ones that connect the scientific data developed by researchers with a program of action for the organization and defence of the working class. For months, the SEP has warned of the seriousness of the health situation and the developing second wave of across Europe, basing itself on serious and publicly available scientific research. These warnings have been confirmed by the events now taking place.

The SEP calls for the formation of safety committees in workplaces and schools, independent of trade unions, to prepare an international general strike against the ruling class policy of herd immunity. Our youth movement, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, is calling for the organisation of a school strike across Europe to close schools and ensure that young people and their families can be protected from the pandemic.



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