

Macron government opposes full lock-down as coronavirus deaths climb

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Hundreds of people are continuing to die every day in France as tens of thousands of new coronavirus infections are being reported.

Another 302 people died in hospitals on Sunday, bringing the total number of deaths in the country to 44,548 since the beginning of the pandemic. Approximately two thirds (30,785 people) have died in hospitals, and almost 13,379 in aged care homes and other social service providers, where the virus is continuing to circulate.

On Saturday, a staggering 932 new deaths were recorded, approximately half of them from uncounted deaths in aged care facilities over the previous four days. Daily deaths in France have averaged over 500 throughout the past week, equivalent to roughly 2,500 per day in a country the size of the United States.

Another 27, 228 cases were recorded yesterday, though the count is always lower due to reduced reporting on Sundays. On Saturday, more than 33,000 people tested positive for the virus. While these represent a reduction from the peak of more than 60,000 daily cases a week ago, likely due to the impact of limited lock-down restrictions from the beginning of November, the virus is continuing to spread rapidly through the population. Within the next 24 hours, the country will surpass two million total cases, the fourth highest in the world.

The hospitals in many regions are at or approaching breaking point. Last Thursday, hospitalizations surpassed the maximum reached during the height of the first wave of the virus in April. The total number of people hospitalized now stands at 33,081. Another 270 people went into intensive care units yesterday, bringing the total to 4,896.

Up-to-date coronavirus case numbers from retirement homes are not readily available, indicating that the

extent of the spread is still unknown.

The hospitalization totals are particularly concentrated in the Île-de-France region around Paris, and in Lyon. In Île-de-France, the portion of occupied ICU beds increased from 92.7 percent last week to 99.7 percent as of Friday.

Other critical surgeries are being cancelled or postponed to free space for coronavirus patients. In Lyon, *France Info* reported yesterday that nurses in the neurosurgery department have created place for 16 beds for coronavirus patients. “These are people with serious respiratory problems, such as we rarely see in the surgical department. Some of them have died... It’s an atmosphere of permanent crisis,” Pascale, a nurse of 19 years, told the news outlet.

The massive and rising death toll was not inevitable. The Macron government deliberately prepared the way for a second wave of the virus with its reopening policies aimed at protecting the profits of French corporations. As early as July, the World Health Organization was already warning that a new second wave could be seen in Europe. Prime Minister Castex insisted that a new lockdown as in March and April would “stop the spread of the virus, of course, but from an economic and social standpoint it’s a disaster.” In other words, nothing could be done that would impinge upon the profit interests of the super-rich.

Even as hundreds of deaths occur each day, the Macron government has rejected the closure of schools and non-essential workplaces. Thousands of teachers have struck in the past two weeks to demand social distancing measures. Schools are packed with anywhere up to 35 students in a classroom, with up to 500 students in canteens, and public transportation at standing room only.

The government is consciously working to conceal

the impact of its school openings on the spread of the virus. On November 6, the government's official count of infected students was 3,528. Over the same period, official statistics from the public health agency revealed that more than 25,000 young people under 19 years old had tested positive. The government made no attempt to explain the contradiction between these figures. Last Friday, the government revised upwards its figure of positive students to more than 12,000, including more than 2,500 who tested positive in only the previous 24 hours.

The maintenance of open schools is intended solely to ensure that parents can continue to go to work while their children are in classrooms.

The Macron administration is not attempting to prevent all coronavirus infections and deaths, but only limit the extent of deaths and hospital breakdown to a point that can be maintained without threatening an explosion of anger and opposition in the working class. That is to say, Macron is pursuing a policy of "herd immunity" in all but name.

In announcing the limited lock-down of restaurants, cafés and some retail at the beginning of the month, Macron stated that the best-case scenario target was for the virus to infect 5,000 people every day. In a press conference last Thursday, Castex maintained this goal, and insisted that no further lock-down measures would be announced.

This is despite the latest indications that an effective vaccine is likely to be completed and available in the course of 2021. Last Monday, pharmaceutical company Pfizer revealed that its trial had been 90 percent effective in preventing the contraction of the virus. As the WSWS explained in its Perspective column published November 10, the development "makes all the more necessary urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives until a vaccine is widely available."

In an interview with *Le Monde* on Saturday, Castex insisted that the likely availability of a virus would have no impact on the government's response. Castex stated that the government's policy was still based on the principle of "living with the virus for a long period," and "as long as we don't have a vaccine, we must give a perspective for the rules of the game."

This is the rationale for the government's policy of keeping schools and non-essential workplaces open,

deliberately allowing the virus to spread, and ensuring that thousands will die unnecessarily before a vaccine is available.



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