

Turkey adopts inadequate restriction policies as COVID-19 surges

Ula? Ate?çi**18 November 2020**

President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an's announcement Tuesday of new coronavirus "restrictions" shows the Turkish government is committed to a "herd immunity" policy, regardless of how many lives are lost. Like governments across Europe faced with growing opposition to official policy, he is announcing token restrictions to try and contain not the pandemic, but anger in the population.

After Health Minister Fahrettin Koca said Monday that the coronavirus science board "recommended implementing concrete measures to prevent the spread of the disease"—an implicit admission that no concrete measures had been taken—President Erdo?an announced on Tuesday night a nationwide weekend curfew from 8 p.m. to 10 a.m., "so as not to disrupt supply and production chains in the country."

That is, the government is prioritizing capitalist profits over human lives. Erdo?an added, "the partial lock-down in effect for people aged over 65 will also be applied for those under 20, with exception of the employed."

Education in schools that entered a week-long fall break will continue online until the end of the year. Erdo?an said, "Working hours of businesses such as shopping centres, markets, barbers and hairdressers will be limited to between 10 a.m. and 8 p.m." Moreover, restaurants and cafés are to open only for takeaway and deliveries.

Apart from school closures, these are token measures, under conditions where the pandemic is out of control across Turkey. Fourteen education workers have died of COVID-19 in Turkey since September, when face-to-face education restarted, according to the Education and Science Laborers' Union (E?itim-Sen), which supported the back-to-school campaign.

Health Minister Koca announced on Tuesday that 103 people have lost their lives in the last 24 hours because of COVID-19 and that they have recorded 3,819 more symptomatic patients.

The Turkish government refuses to announce real data over the pandemic so as to force workers back to work and contain public anger, making an arbitrary, unscientific distinction between "cases" and "patients." However, available information indicates that the situation in Turkey is among the worst in Europe.

Turkey has the second-highest number of severely ill patients in Europe: 3,657. Moreover, intensive care facilities' occupancy rate is 70.8 percent, even after many hospitals increased capacity. One intensive care doctor asked on Twitter: "If 36 patients are currently being treated in the intensive care unit, which had a capacity of 12 people before the pandemic, and the capacity is 60 on paper, is the intensive care occupancy rate 300 percent or 60 percent?"

Turkish Medical Association (TTB) official ?brahim Akkurt said that given estimates that "3.8 percent of cases with PCR-positive tests have pneumonia, and radiological and tomographic tests detected 3,316 pneumonia cases" on Monday, the real number of new cases was 87,263.

The government's "restrictions" come after growing warnings from medical associations and scientists that hospital systems will collapse, and growing anger among health care workers. However, the latest measures aim not to contain the pandemic but to prevent a collapse of hospital systems.

Under these conditions, the TTB announced an "action program" demanding that COVID-19 be regarded as an occupational illness. As of yesterday, at least 161 health care workers have lost their lives to COVID-19, and the virus is ripping through their ranks. The TTB launched a "light on and off action" at 9 p.m. for five days last week, warning that if their demands are not met, they may go on strike.

Last week, the ?stanbul Medical Chamber denounced the government's policy as "bankrupt" and called for an "immediate lock-down" for ?stanbul. Moreover, the

Turkish Thoracic Society called for a nationwide lockdown, stating: “Social mobility should be restricted. Complete closure is required for at least two weeks, or even one month.”

On Tuesday, just before official coronavirus “restrictions” were announced, TTB chairwoman ?ebnem Korur also called for total lock-down, stating: “Workplaces, except for those involved in essential production, must be closed for at least three or four weeks,” adding: “According to scientific studies, a two-week lock-down reduces the infection rate by 22 percent and a four-week lock-down reduces this rate by 38 percent.”

The TTB announced last week that daily cases in ?stanbul had reached around 10,000 by the end of October.

The figure for the western city of Izmir was 1,000, but Izmir Medical Chamber stated that daily cases in the city have reached to 3,500 on Tuesday. Yesterday, the chamber also warned that the health care system in the city is on the verge of collapse. “Ambulances are having difficulty in carrying cases. The available services and intensive care units in hospitals fall short; new COVID-19 services and intensive care units are opened,” it said, adding: “We are at a point which overburdens our health care system’s response capacity to a considerable extent.”

The latest information on the death toll from the pandemic underlines that official death figures are also unreliable. In fact, Turkey has seen hundreds of deaths per day for some time.

The ?stanbul Medical Chamber said that from March 12 to November 4, 2020, a total of 8,456 excess deaths occurred in ?stanbul, compared to the 2015-2019 average, based on ?stanbul Metropolitan Municipality data. However, the total official death toll from COVID-19 in ?stanbul stood at just 3,253 on October 25.

On Saturday, ?stanbul Mayor Ekrem ?mamo?lu (Republican People’s Party, CHP) tweeted that 164 people in ?stanbul alone had lost their lives to infectious diseases. However, the official daily death toll across Turkey was 92 on the same day. On March 28, total deaths from infectious diseases in ?stanbul was only 21. As one-quarter of all new coronavirus patients across Turkey have been diagnosed in ?stanbul, one can surmise that Turkey’s real daily death toll is likely near to 400 or 500—close to France, Spain, the UK or Italy.

?mamo?lu’s second tweet on the issue was another example of the reactionary collaboration between the government and bourgeois opposition parties at the cost

of workers’ lives. “Our Health Minister of Health just called me. He said that they are working precisely on measures,” he wrote, before adding: “It is our duty to take all steps together on the basis of transparency and science with the understanding of mobilization during the pandemic process.”

In fact, Imamo?lu and other CHP officials have done their best to contain growing popular opposition to the “herd immunity” policy, while implementing the very same policies in the cities they control, such as ?stanbul. ?stanbul Governor Ali Yerlikaya thanked Imamo?lu just a few weeks ago, underlining their collaboration on the pandemic. It was no coincidence that the CHP-led municipalities of ?stanbul and Izmir announced some pandemic restrictions just on Tuesday.

These mayors’ failure to disclose their own data and their collaboration with the government since the pandemic began constitutes an indictment of the pseudo-left that supported them in local elections last year as an “alternative” to the Erdo?an government’s candidates.

From the beginning, the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Committee of the Fourth International have called for closing all nonessential workplaces with full income for workers and small businesses affected. Nearly nine months of the pandemic have made clear that the only way forward to contain it and save lives is the independent political intervention of the working class all over the world against the ruling class’ homicidal policy.

Workers must build their rank-and-file committees completely independent of pro-capitalist unions to stop nonessential production and save lives in a fight for socialism and against the root cause of this global catastrophe, i.e., the capitalist system.



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