

France ends coronavirus lockdown, as thousands of cases reported each day

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Yesterday was the end of the second, partial coronavirus lockdown announced by the Macron government at the end of October. The end to travel restrictions means people can move freely around the country in the leadup to the holidays. While there are still more than 10,000 new cases being reported each day, millions are expected to hold Christmas and New Year celebrations with their families.

A nationwide 8:00 p.m.-6:00 a.m. curfew will continue to be in place throughout the holiday period. While gatherings can continue to take place, the population will be forced to remain indoors after 8:00 p.m. except to go to work.

Prime Minister Jean Castex announced the end to the limited lockdown last Thursday. He did so despite admitting that even the government's extremely high threshold of less than 5,000 daily coronavirus cases, which it had declared would be necessary for any loosening of restrictions, was not close to being met.

Hundreds of people are continuing to die each day across the country and thousands throughout Europe. On Sunday, another 371 deaths were reported in France, 481 in Germany, 491 in Italy, 450 in Russia, and 232 in the UK. Across Europe, the total number of people infected with the virus surpassed 20 million yesterday.

In France, the limited lockdown enacted from the end of October, which did not include most workplaces or schools, reduced the spread of the virus, but there are signs that its impact had already peaked earlier this month and is now beginning to reverse.

The total number of cases per day is no longer decreasing. Except for Sunday, where the tally is suppressed due to the closure of testing centers, the daily case count has not dropped below 10,000 per day and is often closer to 15,000. The number of

hospitalisations has actually increased for three successive days, with an additional 242 hospitalisations and 35 new admittances to ICU yesterday.

The travel of millions of people for the holiday season will ensure a further acceleration in the spread of the pandemic. This is exacerbated by the completely insufficient testing system. Last week, the Macron government advised that anyone who is asymptomatic should not get tested even before going to visit their families, because this would overwhelm the testing capabilities of the country. Since many young people carrying the virus are likely to be asymptomatic, this only ensures that more will contaminate their family members.

Yesterday, Castex gave an interview with Europe 1 radio in which he declared that prior to the holiday period, anyone visiting with vulnerable family members should isolate themselves for a week beforehand if possible. He did not explain how this would be possible for millions of families, given that the government has maintained obligatory school attendance for students and kept workplaces open.

"If you can do it ... isolate yourself before the eight days before Christmas. If you can—it's not possible [for everyone]. In every case where it's possible, above all, if you are receiving someone who is vulnerable..."

Castex added that on the coming Thursday and Friday only, parents were encouraged not to send their children to school, if they were able to. This only underscores the criminality and class contempt of the Macron government's entire policy. The official lying justification for maintaining schools open has been that children are less likely to propagate the virus than adults. This has already been refuted by numerous scientific studies on the virus. The recommendation that parents "who are able to" will simply apply to

those who are not compelled to be at work.

Following the holiday period, schools are to reopen as normal on January 4, and currently the government is aiming to reopen even restaurants and bars by late January.

The Macron government's response to the pandemic has not been determined by the scientific requirement to combat the virus and save lives. It has been conditioned by the need to protect the profits of the major French banks and corporations and the wealth of its superrich.

Unlike the first eight-week lockdown in March, the lockdown in October did not restrict production. Keeping schools open, despite warnings that they would be transmission vectors for the virus, is aimed at keeping parents at work and preventing any impact on profits of an economic shutdown. Tens of thousands of people have unnecessarily died as a direct result of these policies.

The same policy has been pursued by governments across Europe and in the United States. In Britain, the Johnson government ended similar limited national lockdowns on December 3, and additionally permitted all stores to open 24 hours a day throughout December and January. In Germany, which has been presented internationally as a model for its response to the virus, there are now more than 500 deaths occurring every day, and the government has refused to close nonessential workplaces or schools.

The fact that these policies are being pursued even as a vaccine is beginning to be distributed, and could save countless lives within a few months' time, only underscores the criminality of this policy.

The class interests that underlie it can be seen in the evolution of share markets across Europe. In France, the main CAC-40 stock market index fell sharply from late February to early March, as the virus spread rapidly across Europe. It stabilized after President Macron's March 12 announcement of a lockdown, accompanied by a pledge to bail out the rich to the tune of hundreds of billions of euros. The CAC-40 has risen continuously since, climbing 20 percent since the end of October alone. It has almost regained its peak from the beginning of the year.

The Socialist Equality Party has advanced the following demands as the only means for countering the homicidal policy of the capitalist elite:

The immediate shutdown of all production at nonessential workplaces and schools

The provision of a monthly income to all families to guarantee a decent standard of living until a return to work is possible

The provision of relief to small businesses at an amount sufficient to maintain the economic viability of the enterprises and the wages and salaries of its employees until their operations can be resumed

The allocation of trillions of dollars to accelerate the production and distribution of vaccines, free of charge and to expand the public health infrastructure, including for testing and contact tracing

The fight for such a policy requires the independent political mobilization of the working class against capitalism, and the fight for a workers' government and the reorganization of economic life on the basis of socialism.



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