

French President Emmanuel Macron tests positive for coronavirus

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French President Emmanuel Macron has tested positive for the coronavirus, according to a statement released by the presidential Élysée palace yesterday morning. Macron's spokesperson Gabriel Attal reported that he had been tested on Wednesday evening, immediately after beginning to experience symptoms of a fever and dry cough. He has been placed in isolation for seven days. His symptoms are currently reported to be mild.

Numerous heads of state in Europe announced yesterday that they had been contacted by French authorities and told they were contact cases. Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez dined with Macron without masks on Monday. Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa is being quarantined preventively, having met with Macron on Wednesday evening. Belgian Prime Minister Alexander de Croo is a contact case after meeting with Macron at the last European summit, and Charles Michel, the head of the European council, is in isolation.

In the French government, Prime Minister Castex has gone into isolation, although he tested negative on Thursday, and will be tested again in seven days. The secretary of the Élysée palace, Alexis Kohler, is being isolated. Macron had also taken part in a working lunch with the heads of all Senate groupings on Monday, including Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Valérie Rabault of the Socialist Party, and Olivier Brecht. They are being tested, although are not officially designated contact cases.

There were statements of solidarity from other heads of European state, which are pursuing the same policy of ending even limited lock-down measures even as the virus spreads throughout the continent. Boris Johnson and Ursula von der Leyen both tweeted statements of support. In the population, however, there was not the

slightest sign of popular sympathy for the “president of the rich,” whose government is pursuing in all but name a policy of “herd immunity,” allowing the virus to spread throughout the population.

Given that the heads of state are subject to the most scrupulous screening measures, the fact that Macron was contaminated only underscores how contagious the virus is and the criminality of the policies he is pursuing.

The day before Macron was tested, France officially ended the very limited national lock-down that had been in place since the end of October. This was despite the fact that the number of daily cases never dropped under twice the official target of 5,000 which it previously declared would be required.

Unlike the first lock-down from March to May, this lock-down never closed schools or non-essential work. As a result, COVID-19 case numbers declined at a much slower rate; hundreds of thousands were consciously allowed to be infected. The government's policy has not been motivated by the requirement to save lives, but to ensure that non-essential production and profit extraction could continue. Many thousands of people are being allowed to die. The partial lockdown was aimed only at preventing a social explosion that the ruling class feared would occur if the hospitals were completely flooded with the sick.

Even these limited restrictions are now being lifted, even as the slowing of the spread in the virus has begun to reverse, and is once again accelerating. Over the past two months, the seven-day rolling average declined, albeit at a much slower pace than during the first lockdown, to a minimum of just over 10,396 on December 5, just after the first loosening of restrictions at the beginning of the month.

It has since increased to 12,121, and new cases and

intensive care unit admissions have risen every day this week. There were 2,850 people in intensive care on Tuesday, and another 289 deaths. On Wednesday, there were more than 17,000 new cases reported in 24 hours.

Millions of families are expected to travel home for the holidays, further accelerating the contagion. On Tuesday, Prime Minister Castex announced that “where possible,” parents would be permitted to not send their children to school on Thursday and Friday this week. Yet the government’s policy of keeping schools open has been justified with false claims that children are less contagious than parents. The government’s latest “offer” will be impossible for millions of families who are still forced to go to work.

Macron has declared that his government is determined to proceed with the reopening of schools after the holiday season on January 4 and will not be postponing the reopening. Keeping schools open is aimed both at ensuring that parents can continue to work, and pursuing a policy of “herd immunity” by allowing the virus to spread among children.

This is preparing an even greater disaster. On Tuesday, the head of the national scientific council, Jean-François Delfraissy, gave an interview with *Le Parisien*, in which he admitted that “we have arrived at a plateau, with a stagnation of new cases around 10 to 15 thousand cases per day. Probably because the virus is tied to the weather and the cold wave has favored its ‘recirculation,’ and because the loosening of measures has permitted more movement in the population, and contamination, even if the French have respected the rules well.”

He added: “Could the present rebound survive until mid-January or later? The answer is yes, the model has not changed, the virus continues to circulate throughout winter. The arrival of the vaccines will not have an impact on the first trimester [four months] of 2021, and very little on the second. The beginning of the year will not be different from 2020.”

Delfraissy added that the vaccination campaign in retirement homes “will not begin before mid-January, and this will take until the end of April, possibly May, to immunize the 22 million most at-risk French people.”

Yet Delfraissy added that because “we don’t expect an epidemic increase before January 10, a priori, the return of classes must continue at the date expected.”

The media is already discussing a likely “third wave.”

In other words, a vaccine is available that could save tens of thousands of lives, but will not be distributed for at least four months. Yet the Macron government is demanding that workers and students return to non-essential production and to school, leading to countless thousands more new cases of COVID-19.

Its policy is premised on a continued acceleration of the pandemic throughout the coldest part of winter, before any vaccine can be effective. This policy of death is premised on the defense of the interests of the French corporate and financial elite, and ensuring that nothing be done which could in any way impinge upon its profits.

In its statement released December 16, the Socialist Equality Party advanced the following essential demands for the working class to intervene into the crisis and prevent the further spread of the pandemic: 1) “All nonessential production must be shut down immediately”; 2) “All schools and universities must be closed to in-person learning”; 3) “a shutdown can be effective only to the extent that workers are fully compensated and have an income until they are able to return to work.”

The fight for this perspective requires the independent political struggle of the working class across Europe, in opposition to all the capitalist parties, for socialism.



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