

Europe nears 750,000 COVID-19 deaths as governments move to end lockdown restrictions

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The European continent, including Russia and Ukraine, is approaching the horrific toll of three quarters of a million deaths due to COVID-19.

As of Friday evening, 729,201 people had already perished. Total infections passed 31 million in Europe the same day, with over 180,000 new cases recorded daily on Wednesday and Thursday this week.

In the UK, there have been over 111,000 deaths, in Italy 90,618, in France 77,952, in Russia 75,732, in Germany 61,161 and in Spain 61,386.

These deaths are measured by governments based on various criteria but are around 20 percent lower than the real figure, according to a study of excess deaths by *Nature* magazine, meaning that Europe may be closer to a million deaths.

Around 5,000 people a day are dying in Europe and the pandemic is undergoing a dramatic resurgence in parts of the continent. The mass loss of life continues amid escalating moves to end lockdown and restrictions by governments.

In Britain, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government has announced a "roadmap" out of its current limited lockdown, beginning February 22—with around 20,000 new infections announced daily and an average of over 1,000 deaths.

Lockdowns are being ended in the knowledge that not only are new and more deadly variants of the virus developing, including the UK's B117, but they continue to infect, and at a higher rate.

On Friday, a million people in Liverpool, Preston and Lancashire in the North West of England were advised to get a Covid test, including for a far wider range of symptoms than the original strain, with more than 100 cases of a new mutated strain (E484K) of the virus detected in the region.

The two variants acknowledged to be more infectious than the British mutation originated in Brazil and South Africa. Latest reports attest that the British mutation has itself mutated to resemble the South Africa variant. All this points

to COVID-19 becoming more infectious and therefore more deadly.

In some countries, B117, first detected only last September, has become the dominant variant.

The terrible implications are already unfolding with devastating consequences, with its most deadly impact in Portugal. A resurgence of the virus is being led by the spread of the British variant with deaths surging from 167 on January 18 to 275 on January 24 and rising again to 303 by January 28. In the last week, 1,854 lives have been lost to Covid in Portugal, an average of 264 a day. By Wednesday, over the previous seven days, almost 850 new coronavirus cases were recorded for every 100,000 inhabitants.

Last month, Portugal recorded the worst rate of per capita COVID-19 new infections in the world. According to health authorities, 43 percent of the country's overall COVID-19 infections and 44 percent of all related deaths were recorded in January alone. Hospitals are unable to offer care for those sick and dying of Covid, with *Deutsche Welle* reporting Wednesday that with the "country's intensive care units (ICUs) already treating around 850 patients there are almost no vacant beds for the treatment of severe new coronavirus cases."

"Approximately 6,700 other patients are being looked after in normal hospital wards and triage tents have even been erected outside some hospitals. Here doctors decide which patients to treat first on the basis of oxygen levels and body temperature. Field hospitals, too, are being speedily set up to take in more sick people."

A further indication of the spread can be seen in the Netherlands. The *Dutch News* web site reported that the RIVM public health institute has "warned that the more infectious version of the virus first identified in Britain may now account for two-thirds of all new cases in the Netherlands. The estimate is based on computer models rather than actual lab results.

"Nevertheless, this is further evidence that there are two

pandemics underway in the Netherlands—the older form of the virus and the new B117 variant, the RIVM said.”

Under these conditions, the reopening of school is proceeding as a key component in fully reopening of the economy—with tens of millions of parents herded back into workplaces across Europe.

The Scottish National Party government is beginning school reopenings on February 22, with Johnson’s Conservative government planning to reopen schools in the rest of the UK just days after. This is supported by opposition Labour Party leader Sir Keir Starmer, who took to the pages of the pro-Tory *Daily Mail* this week and proclaimed, “I share the Government’s ambition to make it a national mission to reopen our schools. I will do everything in my power as leader of the Labour Party to make that happen.”

Calling for national unity with Johnson’s herd immunity government of social murderers in defence of the economy he insisted, “We are only going to get our children back into school, reopen society and secure our economy if we are bold, decisive and working together.”

There are growing signs of resistance among workers and students to the danger to life posed by these homicidal policies. This week schools strikes, which began in Nuremberg at seven schools on Monday, have continued to spread throughout Germany. Meeting an enthusiastic response on social media among students, they spread to Augsburg within three days. In Bavaria, schoolchildren struck against the state government’s attempts to force graduating classes back into classroom teaching amid the pandemic. Students have told the WSWs of the support of educators for their strikes, as teachers and school principals unanimously call for the continuation of distance learning for all students.

On January 31, the *World Socialist Web Site* published a perspective, “Capitalism vs. socialism: The pandemic and the global class struggle”. It summarised the irreconcilable conflict between the two major classes in society—the bourgeois oligarchy and the working class: “One year into the crisis, the pandemic has starkly revealed the class divide that separates the capitalist and socialist programs,”

The perspective identified the seven main opposed standpoints between the capitalist and socialist programme for the pandemic.

1. The capitalist program insists that the response to the pandemic must prioritize saving the financial markets over saving lives. The socialist program insists that the response to the pandemic must prioritize saving lives over saving the financial markets.

2. The capitalist program asserts that pandemic policy must be driven by profit interests. The socialist program

advocates that medical policy must be guided by science.

3. The capitalist program advocates a program of “herd immunity,” allowing the virus to spread with as few restrictions as possible while vaccinations are produced and distributed. The socialist program calls for all measures to impede virus transmission until the necessary number of people to stop community spread of the virus have been inoculated.

4. The capitalist program insists, in accordance with its “herd immunity” strategy, that factories and other workplaces be kept open for business. The socialist program insists that all nonessential workplaces be closed down until inoculated workers can safely return to their jobs.

5. The capitalist program demands that schools be reopened, claiming falsely that there is little risk to students and teachers. The socialist program, based on scientific evidence that schools are a major source of virus transmission, demands that schools remain closed until the pandemic has been brought under control.

6. The capitalist program seeks to restrict social expenditures aimed at counteracting the economic impact of the pandemic on the great mass of the people, while demanding that central banks provide unlimited support for the financial markets and large corporations. The socialist program demands full income compensation to workers and small businesses to be paid for by the expropriation of the pandemic profiteers in big business.

7. The capitalist program promotes a policy of vaccination nationalism, restricting and opposing equitable distribution of vaccines throughout the world. The socialist program, recognizing that the coronavirus can be eradicated only through a scientifically directed international strategy, calls for a globally coordinated inoculation program.”

This Sunday, a vital online meeting, sponsored by the WSWs is being held that will review the critical political, historical and programmatic issues for workers in fighting against the homicidal policies of the ruling elite.



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