

# Europe passes three quarters of a million COVID-19 deaths

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Europe passed on Wednesday the horrific milestone of three quarters of a million dead to COVID-19.

With the 5,091 fatalities recorded yesterday, the death toll of the continent, including Russia and the Ukraine, reached 751,432 according to figures published by Worldometer. The grim tally was reached just a year short of the first recorded death on the continent—a Chinese tourist who was reported dead in a French hospital on February 15 last year.

Thousands of deaths are being reported daily on every continent, with global fatalities reaching 2,362,515 Wednesday evening.

COVID-19 deaths as measured by governments are around 20 percent lower than the real figure, according to a study of excess deaths by *Nature* magazine, meaning that Europe is in reality closer to a million deaths.

Over 31 million coronavirus infections have ravaged Europe's population over the last year. In the first three days of this week more than 370,000 new cases were reported, with many of these mutations of the original strain.

The capitalist class is at war with society. Last week, the prestigious *British Medical Journal* accused the world's governments of "social murder" in their collective response to the pandemic.

The scale of death being witnessed in Europe and across the globe is unprecedented outside of wartime. There were on average about 6,060 deaths a day in World War 1. Over a year after the pandemic started there were 13,000 deaths globally from COVID-19 Tuesday and over 14,000 Wednesday. In the course of 48 hours, Tuesday and Wednesday, 10,500 more deaths were recorded in Europe.

The battles of the Somme and Verdun fought in Europe during World War 1 were among the most

terrible events in history, with an estimated 600,000 lives lost as soldiers were wiped out by machine guns and shells for months on end. Today even more lives have been lost to a deadly virus across the continent, with workers still being sent into unsafe factories, offices and schools as the pandemic rages.

This policy has been overseen by governments no matter what their political stripe. All have the same agenda of herd immunity dictated by the oligarchs and major corporations. All are indifferent to threat to the lives and health of millions, especially when this impacts on the working class.

The policy of "herd immunity," of letting the virus rip through the population without serious measures of containment, should more properly be called a policy of death. This was most brutally summed up, at the outset of the pandemic, by UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's former chief adviser Dominic Cummings, as "herd immunity, protect the economy, and if that means some pensioners die, too bad."

The pandemic has taken over 120,000 lives in Britain.

With thousands still dying every day, under conditions in which the virus has mutated into even more deadly and contagious strains, and with only a fraction of the population vaccinated, the ruling elite is insisting that even limited lockdowns are ended as rapidly as possible and schools and workplaces are fully reopened.

The terrible consequences can be seen most graphically in Portugal, which, after lifting many restrictions, recently suffered the worst death rate in the world, as the highly contagious British variant rapidly spread throughout the population.

• In Britain, a "roadmap" to end what is termed the "last lockdown" begins February 22, with the devolved Scottish National Party government already planning to

open schools from that date.

- In France, schools remain open under its partial lockdown. Last week French universities began to partially reopen to students. In a recent National Security Council meeting, French President Emmanuel Macron said, in a comment leaked to the media, 'I have had enough of those scientists who only respond to my questions about the variants with one single scenario: that of a new lockdown... Everything must be done to avoid a new lockdown.'

- Germany reviewed its lockdown yesterday and is moving towards the full reopening of schools and day-care centers. On Tuesday Rainer Dulger, President of the Confederation of German Employers' Associations, told the Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland news station, "From the employers' point of view, it would be incomprehensible to continue the restrictive measures without finally identifying a clear and rule-based opening scenario that is also supported by a broad majority."

The message of the ruling class was aired in Britain's pro-Tory *Daily Telegraph* on Wednesday. Philip Johnston, the newspaper's assistant editor, declared in an op-ed piece, "The Government ought to be honest that our only realistic strategy now is to treat the virus like flu."

He added, "The Government needs to be upfront with people about the realities. We will be living with Covid for decades, people will catch it every year and thousands will die. That is what has happened with past contagions and, while we are now in a better position to mitigate, treat and vaccinate, that is what will happen with this one."

In a summing up the universal insistence that profits are all that matters for the ruling class, Johnston wrote of the virus, "We can't eliminate it. Well, we can, but the cost would be colossal."

The working class can only oppose the mass slaughter taking place by intervening independently with its own socialist programme.

Rank and file committees must be established in every workplace and ensure that all non-essential production is halted until it is safe to return to work.

Schools and other education settings, which are proven vectors of virus transmission, must be closed and all the resources required for distance learning made available.

Wages and jobs must be safeguarded by seizing the assets and wealth of the pandemic profiteers—the major transnational corporations and the financial oligarchy.

Workers and young people internationally are opposed to working in unsafe conditions. Strikes by pupils have broken out in Germany and have won the backing of teachers and other education staff. But as every experience shows, including the recent struggle by teachers in Chicago in the US, the working class cannot entrust its fate to the rotten pro-capitalist trade unions, which work in alliance with governments of all political denominations to police the homicidal back to work/back to school policies.

This struggle requires a political programme and leadership. The Socialist Equality Parties in Europe and internationally are leading the fight against the pandemic. In a *World Socialist Web Site* perspective January 31, "Capitalism vs. socialism: The pandemic and the global class struggle," the International Committee of the Fourth International outlined a programme on which the working class is able to intervene and prevent further mass death.

The WSWS perspective insisted that to oppose the capitalist programme, which "insists that the response to the pandemic must prioritize saving the financial markets over saving lives," workers must fight for a socialist programme that "insists that the response to the pandemic must prioritize saving lives over saving the financial markets."



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