

France: Macron's "health pass" conceals policy of "herd immunity"

Jacques Valentin
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When the French daily *Le Monde* reported on the national defence council meeting held on July 21, it noted that President Emmanuel Macron had made "a clear and categorical refusal," a "sort of presidential veto" to the possibility of imposing local lockdowns or curfews in areas with high coronavirus infections, in addition to the "health pass" which mandates vaccinations.

The "health pass" restricts access to public places to people who have been vaccinated, recently recovered from COVID-19 or who have recently been tested. While it has been presented as a complementary measure to encourage vaccination, it is a set of disparate and inconsistent measures. It aims above all to justify the widest possible reopening of economic activity for the accumulation of profits, while allowing the virus to circulate widely.

The day before the defence council of July 21, Health Minister Olivier Véran reported a tripling of the number of positive cases in one week—a record growth since the beginning of the pandemic in France. This followed the lifting of the last partial lockdown measures. The much more contagious Delta variant has increased from 20 percent at the end of June to over 98 percent today.

Macron's "health pass" involves a fundamental deception, to make people believe that measures are being taken to fight the virus, whereas there is no policy to reduce its circulation. The pass has nothing to do with a scientifically based policy to eradicate the virus.

The virus is spreading rapidly in France, with daily new cases at over 18,000 on average. The incidence is higher in different regions. In particular, it is significantly higher in the holiday areas of the South West and South East, as well as in the entire area near the Pyrenees. Six departments in the south of France have rates above 300 per 100,000 people. The end of August holidays will likely lead to a mixing of populations and an increased spread throughout the country.

The reopening of schools this week will inevitably create a health catastrophe. Youth vaccination rates remain low and are zero for children under 12. The reopening of schools under such conditions would be disastrous and poses the necessity of mobilisation of the working class, independently of the trade union apparatuses that support the school reopenings, against it. (See: "Reopening of French schools threatens children's lives.")

In Martinique and Guadeloupe, where vaccination rates are three times lower than in metropolitan France, including among the elderly, Macron's in-principle rejection of lockdown measures has

produced an explosion of cases. Only after several weeks of rapid case growth were social distancing measures belatedly announced this month. Hospitals are already overwhelmed, and the number of health workers is insufficient. A large number of deaths is expected in September and October, as many patients will not be able to access resuscitation units due to a lack of beds and available staff.

In response to the catastrophic situation in the French islands, Macron impudently declared that "if it had to be demonstrated that vaccination is the most efficient way to respond to the Delta variant, unfortunately our Antilles are providing a cruel demonstration." What a fraud! While vaccination is essential to combat the virus, the real "cruelty" is that of Macron's policy, which consists of lifting lockdown measures, encouraging tourist travel and relying almost exclusively on vaccination alone, whether in the overseas French territories or in mainland France.

Macron justifies his refusal to take additional measures by referring to the "social acceptability" of restrictions on personal liberties of movement, as though public health measures were arbitrary, and not based on the necessity to contain the pandemic and save lives. In fact, Macron uses the same anti-scientific language as his adversaries, who openly oppose vaccination, the health pass and social distancing measures, and have held demonstrations dominated by the far right.

While the rate of vaccination required to prevent the spread of the virus is estimated to be somewhere in the region of 90 percent, and only 57.5 percent of the French population is completely vaccinated, it is impossible to speak of vaccination replacing social distancing measures. In addition, according to the latest studies on the Delta variant, while the vaccine severely cuts the severity of the virus among infected patients, as demonstrated by the proportionately small number of vaccinated patients in ICU, a non-negligible number contract less severe forms of the disease and are also contagious.

This makes clear that it is all the more necessary to combine vaccination with energetic social distancing measures, isolation and contact tracing, including for those who are vaccinated, and including partial and complete lockdowns when necessary. This is why the "health pass" that fully opens public places and permits the mixing of vaccinated and non-vaccinated people who have had a recent test (whose validity has been extended to 72 hours) is inefficient and dangerous.

Disastrous consequences have already resulted from this policy.

After reaching a low point in mid-July, the total number of people hospitalized has since risen to 11,092 as of yesterday, up from 9,000 only two weeks ago. The number of people in critical care has reached 2,276, up from 1,831 two weeks ago. Mortality has risen sharply and now exceeds over 100 per day. Yesterday, the official total number of deaths by COVID-19 is 114,210 in France, 1,170,200 in Europe and 4,513,868 worldwide, though the real numbers are far higher.

Despite these alarming figures, Macron has refused to take any actions to contain the pandemic in France. No measures have been taken in departments where the contamination is very high, such as in Occitania. Behind the facade of vaccination and the “health pass,” it is the policy of “herd immunity” that is once again being pursued, as in the UK. On July 19, Prime Minister Boris Johnson lifted all lockdown measures on the occasion of what he cynically called “Freedom Day.”

In Spain, youth have been deliberately sacrificed, with incidence rates among this age group several times higher than the national average.

The irresponsible policy in Europe has resulted in many countries, such as Great Britain, Ireland, Spain, Portugal and France, exceeding 200 cases per 100,000 people. For the whole of Europe, it is over 160.

In India, the fight against the coronavirus has been sabotaged from the outset by the Modi government. A study by the US-based Center for Global Development estimates that there were between 1.5 and 3.4 million excess deaths during the first wave of the pandemic, between April 2020 and March 2021. With the spread of the Delta variant between April and June of this year, between 1.4 and 2.4 million people died in three months, a death rate three times higher than normal. According to the report, “The actual deaths are probably in the millions, not the hundreds of thousands” reported by Indian authorities.

These results confirm that COVID-19-related deaths are grossly underestimated internationally, and that they are well over 10 million deaths, instead of the 4.51 million reported by official figures. Those responsible for this mass death are not to be found in India alone, but first and foremost in the heart of world capitalism, in the USA and in Europe. It is there that the priority of profits over human life has been decreed and that the refusal to conduct any international policy to fight the pandemic has been endorsed.

COVID-19 has killed 633,000 people in the USA and more than 1.1 million in Europe. The epidemic is in full recovery in the USA and in Europe. The indicators in many countries point to a strong resurgence of the virus, depending also on the progress of vaccinations. National governments are practicing a deliberate policy of herd immunity, leaving millions of young Europeans and Americans to be contaminated, including with severe illness and Long COVID, producing an inevitable rebound in the infection of older age groups, and the risk of creating even more dangerous variants.

Although the Delta variant is highly contagious, an aggressive policy of isolation and tracing would stop transmission as part of an internationally driven policy. The Chinese successfully blocked a Delta variant outbreak in May 2021 in Guangzhou, Guangdong

Province, which stopped after infecting a total of 167 people over a 26-day period. Since then, China has faced a new and more serious series of cases. It has deployed millions of tests, contact tracing and isolation to block the spread of the virus.

At a recent international online meeting organised by the WSWs involving leading scientists from around the world, for example, Dr. Malgorzata Gasperowicz, a developmental biologist and researcher at the University of Calgary, gave a detailed presentation demonstrating that aggressive coordinated measures could have eliminated the pandemic within two months, had they been taken from the outset, and that even with the Delta variant, elimination of the virus could be achieved within months.

In France, Macron is responsible for tens of thousands of avoidable deaths, but he has received constant political support from the trade union apparatuses and the parties of the pseudo-left. This has allowed him to protect the interests of the financial elite over the lives of the population. This is part of a policy pursued by the ruling class throughout the European Union to impose a return to work and school and to let the virus spread in defiance of scientific recommendations. Yet explosive anger is building against the ruling class across Europe and internationally.

The repeated partial lockdowns and now “health pass,” including grossly ineffective measures, and the absence of a campaign of education for vaccination, has opened a space for the extreme right to cultivate support for its campaign against vaccination. But the far-right’s denunciations of the “health pass” are aimed at abandoning all health measures and assuming openly the policy of “herd immunity.”

The pseudo-left and a part of the trade union apparatus are now calling for support for this campaign by the extreme right. This must be rejected with contempt. It results in strengthening Macron, as he pursues his agenda of strengthening his police state regime and prepares new attacks on the social rights of the working class.

Workers must create their own rank-and-file action committees, and break from the influence of the union apparatuses and the pseudo-left that has aligned itself behind the slogans of the far right. A struggle must be waged against Macron’s policy of austerity and mass death, including against the reopening of in-person schooling. Contrary to the attacks from the right against Macron, the struggle must be anchored in the interests of the working class and have an international and socialist perspective.



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