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## *As European governments demand population “live with” COVID-19 surge, workers must take up a socialist strategy*

The pandemic in Europe has already led to over 1.1 million deaths and almost 50 million people infected. It is set to drastically worsen as a new COVID-19 wave sweeps the continent.

The rampant spread of the virus in the UK portends events across the continent. There are dire predictions that millions more will be infected in Britain in a matter of weeks, where the more infectious Delta variant already accounts for almost all cases



Dr. Michael Ryan (left) at a conference in 2020 when the WHO declared the pandemic a Public Health emergency of International Concern [Credit: Fabrice Coffrini]

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By May 3, UK daily cases had fallen to 1,597, with deaths reduced to single figures. But Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative government's reckless opening of virtually all the economy on May 17, allowing the virus to infect the unvaccinated, particularly children and young people, saw infections reach 10,000 a day by June 18, 20,000 by June 29 and 30,000 by July 7.

The UK's herd immunity policy was denounced this week by Dr Mike Ryan, the head of the World Health Organization's (WHO) emergencies programmes, and by 122 scientists and doctors who wrote a letter published in the *Lancet*, one of the world's premiere medical journals. Ryan stated, "...the logic of more people being infected is better, is I think logic that has proven its moral emptiness and its epidemiological stupidity previously."

Opposing propaganda that vaccines have "broken the link between infection and mortality," the letter in the *Lancet* described ending anti-COVID measures on July 19 as "embarking on a dangerous and unethical experiment." Calling for the entire population to be fully vaccinated, it declared, "The link between infection and death might have been weakened, but it has not been broken, and infection can still cause substantial morbidity in both acute and long-term illness."

Herd immunity is, however, the policy of every European government. Last October Johnson insisted, behind closed doors, that there must be no more lockdowns, declaring, "Let the bodies pile high in their thousands." But this is now the undeclared mantra of the ruling elite everywhere. It is what is really meant by French President Emmanuel Macron and his ilk when they insist that we must all "learn to live with the virus."

Across the continent, social distancing and all other safety measures are being junked in what Britain's *Daily Mail* celebrated as a "bonfire of coronavirus controls," aimed at liberating the operations of big business. The impact will be devastating.

Almost 100,000 new cases a day are already being recorded across Europe. In the last week there were 570,251 infections, up 40 percent on the previous week. Nearly 1,000 people are dying every day.

In Europe too, infection is being driven by the more transmissible Delta variant. The WHO's regional director for Europe, Hans Kluge, predicts that the Delta variant will be dominant in all of Europe within weeks.

If anything, the escalation of infections and deaths will likely be more telescoped than in the UK. Almost 70 percent of Britain's population have received one dose and over 51 percent have received the required two doses. By contrast, 63 percent of Europe's population has still not received a first vaccine dose. Half the elderly and 40 percent of health care workers are unvaccinated.

The grave situation threatening millions of the unvaccinated is epitomised by Russia. With daily caseloads around a third less than the UK, deaths have topped 700 for the last four days because only 13 percent of the population is fully vaccinated.

By the first week of this month infections had already jumped by 10 percent across 53 countries constituting the WHO's European region area. This surge is worst in countries where governments have allowed tourism to resume. According to the *Financial Times*, the Delta variant accounts for 30 percent of all cases in Spain "and is set to become dominant around July 17." Spain reported 32,607 new cases Monday and has already recorded more coronavirus cases this year than in the whole of 2020, hitting the young hardest. Portugal, where the Delta variant already accounts for 70 percent of cases, has recorded the highest daily cases since February.

Greece has seen a 200 percent surge in cases in the last week alone.

Every European government knows the dangers of another wave of the pandemic, but no coordinated action is being taken to combat it. Their only concern is to fling open economies continent-wide so that profits continue to flow into the coffers of the corporations and banks.

Mass super-spreader events are not only encouraged but celebrated as proof that things are truly "back to normal." The delayed 2020 European Championship soccer tournament has been attended by 1.4 million spectators, with 24 national teams playing in 11 different cities across Europe. But dwarfing the attendance of 66,000 at London's Wembley stadium for the semi-final between England and Denmark are the scenes of city centres

turned into massive “fan zones,” along with the pubs and bars across Europe packed to the rafters.

The policy of the ruling class means the continuation of the pandemic and, with it, mass death and social devastation. The only social force able to stop this war on society is the international working class.

At the beginning of the pandemic, it was the action of workers who walked out on strike at key auto, machining and food-processing plants in Italy and across Europe that forced governments to impose the initial lockdowns and to bring in furlough schemes to damp down social opposition.

Today this forced retreat by the ruling class has ended. There is a systematic effort to minimise the dangers faced by the working class, involving the mass media and with the eager assistance of the trade unions and social democratic parties.

However, not only does substantial opposition still exist among Europe’s workers, it threatens to ignite under conditions where the ruling class offensive to destroy jobs, wages and social services and claw back the cost of the multi-trillion-euro bailouts of big business is bringing social and political tensions to the breaking point. This has already led to an eruption of working class opposition internationally, including mass protests in Latin America and strikes at Warrior Met Coal, Frito-Lay and Volvo trucks in the United States, all in defiance of efforts by the trade union bureaucracy to impose sellout contracts. This week Volvo workers in Ghent, Belgium, mounted a wildcat strike against a similar sellout by their union.

Everything now depends on the working class adopting a new axis of struggle and building the leadership necessary to fight for it.

Last September, the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Germany), Socialist Equality Party (UK), Parti de l’égalité socialiste (France) and its sympathising section in Turkey, Sösyalist Eşitlik, called for the continent-wide mobilisation of the working class against the murderous agenda of the ruling elite. The statement of the European sections concluded, “The task now facing the growing mobilization and political radicalization of

the working class in Europe is the struggle to seize the resources stolen by the ruling class in years of obscene bailouts, bring down the EU governments, overthrow the capitalist system, and replace the reactionary EU with the United Socialist States of Europe.”

This demands the formation of workplace rank-and-file committees operating independently from the nationalist, pro-capitalist trade unions. The ICFI sections have been working to mobilise key sections of workers in education, transport and other sectors and championing unified cross-border action of all workers now coming into struggle, such as in the strikes by Volvo workers in the US and Belgium.

The working class must mount a unified fightback. Take control out of the hands of the capitalists and their political representatives; repeal the multi-billion bailouts handed to big business and redirect financial and industrial resources toward fighting the pandemic and ensuring the safety of the population and safeguarding jobs and essential services from destruction. And above all build sections of the ICFI in every country to wage the necessary struggle for socialism.

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