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Scientists warn European governments' inaction on Omicron variant threatens social collapse

Multiple European scientific authorities are warning that official refusal to employ scientific policies to halt the spread of the Omicron variant of COVID-19 is leading to disaster. As state authorities across Europe refusing to implement mass stay-at-home orders, the virus is surging, threatening unprecedented levels of infection and death, the total swamping of health systems, and the collapse of critical food and energy infrastructure.

These warnings make clear the necessity of the working class taking decisive action to impose a policy to eliminate the virus and avert a catastrophe. Before the Omicron variant emerged, European Union (EU) officials shrugged off official warnings that 400,000 to 700,000 people could die of COVID-19 this winter in Europe—this in addition to the nearly 1.5 million who have already died. Now, scientists are warning that the highly-transmissible, more vaccine-resistant Omicron variant threatens far greater levels of death and social dislocation.



A coronavirus patient breathes with an oxygen mask at a tent hospital for COVID-19 patients in Kakhovka, Ukraine, Sunday, Oct. 31, 2021. (AP Photo/Evgeniy Maloletka)

Professor Mahmoud Zureik of the University of Versailles warned that the French government's proposal to possibly make vaccination mandatory, announced Friday by Health Minister Olivier Véran, is insufficient. "The measures announced on Friday are very timid, they are not the kind that will make the curve of infections go down," he told the *Journal du Dimanche* (JDD).

Asked whether the current policy would lead to "a paralyzed society where a large part of the population, either infected or suspected of being so, stays home," Zureik replied: "That is the main concern currently. In Great Britain, the number of cases due to Omicron is currently doubling in less than two days. The health system risks being under extreme stress, and, beyond hospitals, the demand for tests and for medical visits will be very high."

Zureik warned that such mass infection would lead not only to high levels of death, but the collapse of critical infrastructure. He said, "The impact will first be felt on health professionals, with a dilemma: if they are infected and isolate themselves, we will not have enough health staff, but if they stay, they can infect their coworkers and non-Covid patients. Then, the country may be paralyzed if front-line jobs, like supermarket cashiers, cannot be filled."

Zureik added, “Currently schools are the main motor of viral transmission in the Western European countries.” He cited unprecedented numbers of child hospitalizations in France, 210 just over the last week for children under 9. He called for France to adopt “a clear, proactive operational strategy based on working from home, ventilation, control of air quality and mass communication with the public about these challenges.”

A similar warning came from the German government’s Coronavirus Expert Council yesterday. “If the spread of the Omicron variant in Germany continues as it has, a significant part of the population will fall sick and/or will go into quarantine. This would mean that the health system and all the critical infrastructure would be extremely hard hit,” its report stated, referring to potential disruptions to health care and energy infrastructure.

The report called for urgent measures to limit social contact, stating: “Effective nationwide measures to control infections must be prepared, especially well-planned and clearly-explained measures to limit social contact.”

It called for “complete and immediate preparation” to protect critical infrastructure, as “control mechanisms need to be available in the short term” to ensure the continuity of key supply chains.

In fact, bitter experience has shown that European governments will continue with murderous policies of mass infection, no matter what the impact on hospitals and on loss of life.

Even before the Omicron wave fully hits continental Europe, health systems are on the verge of collapse after two years of overwork. Dr. Arnaud Chiche told France Télévisions: “The situation is so dramatic that we do not have enough beds in cardiology or neurology. We are having a hard time getting treatment for people who are suffering from strokes and heart attacks.”

Already now, he added, “80 percent of hospital beds are occupied by COVID-19 patients, many emergency services and mobile emergency teams are closed due to a lack of personnel, we are missing beds everywhere, and doctors have a hard time getting patients into hospitals. ... There is a feeling in the air like it is February 2020, we are all worried. We have the impression that something very serious is about to happen.”

“We are all sort of afraid of being overtaken by something very large in terms of the influx of patients. Health care staff will do our best as always, it is our job, and the French people should be reassured about that. But the government is in the wrong,” Chiche continued, calling for a “great Marshall Plan” to help hospitals.

The only way to avert a horrific catastrophe is to allow youth and nonessential workers to shelter at home for a number of weeks to slash infection levels. Once viral transmission is driven far lower, as it was by initial lockdowns in China and Europe in the spring of 2020, contact tracing and the isolation of infected individuals can, together with mass vaccination and other scientific techniques, eliminate transmission of the virus. However, such a policy can be imposed only through a conscious, international mass mobilization of the working class.

It requires massive financial support to workers, the self-employed and small businesses, so they can pass through a lockdown financially unscathed. Moreover, it requires a political struggle to remove from power a ruling aristocracy that has repeatedly shown its contempt for human life, and its determination to keep factories and schools open, no matter the consequences, in order to keep reaping massive profits on the financial markets.

The financial aristocracy’s arguments, which underlie the policy pursued in London, Berlin, Paris and beyond, were laid out in a fascistic article last week in the *Daily Telegraph* titled, “They may not realise it, but the lockdown skeptics have won the Omicron war.”

As daily infections top 90,000 in Britain, the newspaper wrote: “If the Government had really been determined to flatten the curve, it would have had to lock us down a week ago. Instead, it opted for a series of pointless half-measures aimed at preparing us psychologically to be locked down, as and when ministers thought it absolutely necessary. This approach has, however, been overtaken by events. The speed of the omicron epidemic is such that we are almost certainly going to get locked down by the virus itself before the Government implements its own version.”

The paper called to drive up infection levels until hospitals collapse, so workers are terrorized into staying at home by fear of death. It wrote, “Once a certain proportion of the country has the virus—a third, say—we will be in effective lockdown even if we’re not in

a legal one,” adding: “If hospitals start turning away the sick, a spontaneous lockdown will take hold, as people worry the health system is no longer available.”

The paper made clear it did not know and did not care how many lives would be lost in such a genocidal experiment. “We are about to witness how a Covid wave passes through the population interrupted by our own immunity and personal decisions. The result may not be pretty,” the *Telegraph* admitted. However, it nonetheless endorsed this policy as an opportunity to “learn the right lessons about how to manage a wave without resorting to house arrest.”

The financial aristocracy’s misanthropic opposition to any collective effort to save lives and end the pandemic can only be broken by an international working class movement for a scientific policy and for socialism.

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