

As COVID-19 surges, France's Révolution Permanente attacks public health measures

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The current surge of COVID-19 is exposing the French website Révolution Permanente (RP), affiliated to Argentina's Morenoite Socialist Workers Party (PTS). While they criticize the widely-decried inadequacy of French health spending, they align themselves with President Emmanuel Macron's refusal to implement scientific public health measures necessary to stop mass deaths.

Each week sees over 2 million new cases of COVID-19 and nearly 30,000 deaths across Europe. The seven-day average for infections in France is 48,775. Over the last two weeks, the number of critical patients has risen 56 percent to 2,539 while deaths rose 38 percent to 877. While this upsurge is driven by the Delta variant, the highly infectious and more vaccine-resistant Omicron variant is spreading rapidly, threatening an even deadlier wave. In response, RP writes:

“While the government still turns a blind eye and follows the policy of the MEDEF [business federation], refusing to go back on its ending of free testing, it is more than ever essential to fight for a health plan that is equal to the situation. A plan that responds to the imperative need to break the chains of contamination by imposing free testing, an essential measure to curb the surge in cases, but more broadly by injecting resources into public hospitals, massive hiring and increasing the salaries of caregivers, in the front line since the beginning of the crisis.”

RP repeatedly claims that testing for COVID-19 will stop the contagion, but this is scientifically false. Tests track the spread of the virus but do not stop it. Tracing contacts of infected individuals, testing them and isolating positive cases from the population, can indeed eliminate transmission of the virus and end the pandemic. However, as China's containment of

multiple COVID-19 outbreaks has shown, contact-tracing campaigns require there to be a fairly small number of infected individuals.

At this point, reducing new cases to a number where contact-tracing can be carried out requires a large-scale lockdown to drastically cut daily infections. A strict lockdown at the beginning of the pandemic, in March to May 2020, indeed cut infections to a few hundred per day in France. However, RP staunchly opposes strict lockdowns.

After Austria implemented a partial lockdown last month, RP denounced it. Though it was a partial, and therefore ineffective lockdown, that did not require distance learning in schools and the ending of nonessential production, RP attacked it as a dictatorial infringement on individual liberties. It wrote: “After the Netherlands, which implemented a curfew, and Germany, which introduced a health pass, Austria therefore becomes the new country to impose authoritarian measures on its population, in the absence of a health strategy.”

This reckless and false denunciation of public health measures necessary to save millions of lives as “authoritarian” underlies all RP's articles. Referring to the surge of cases in France in an article titled “One patient in ICUs every ten minutes,” it writes:

“Again, in the face of an emergency which could become critical, we must propose a plan that goes against Macron's health authoritarianism. Breaking chains of contamination to prevent an acceleration of the epidemic's exponential dynamic is indispensable. We must demand that testing be free. No one should ever have been required to pay for them. As the epidemic surges, massive testing is fundamental. This demand must go hand-in-hand with a broader prevention program, investing in air purifiers and

aeration systems in schools and public places, and also massively investing in the health system, which has been hard hit by the crisis and weakened by the ‘scarcity’ of health workers driven by poor working conditions.”

The indifference to human life underlying RP’s pandemic policy is reflected in its claim that, after 1.5 million deaths in Europe, the situation “could become critical.”

As the WSWS has explained, there are three basic approaches to the COVID-19 pandemic: herd immunity, mitigation, and elimination of the virus. The first is the false claim that the spread of the virus will give the population immunity from the virus, and so should be encouraged. The second is the conception that vaccination, combined with asking governments to enact a hodge-podge of measures like air purifiers in schools, will bring the pandemic under control.

Mitigation, advocated both by RP and the Macron government, has led to 120,000 deaths in France. Its problem is not only that governments in France and across Europe refuse to spend the money necessary to fund the various half-measures they advocate. Even if a few more air purifiers were made available in schools and factories, however, it would not be enough to stop the transmission of the virus—which is airborne can travel large distances—and avert mass death.

The third approach, the elimination of the virus, involves reorienting society and all its resources via the collective mobilization of the working class to destroy the virus and end the pandemic once and for all, on a global scale.

RP’s mitigation policy and its denunciations of lockdowns is already leading to a disastrous winter driven by mass circulation of the Delta variant, against which existing vaccines only give partial protection. But the arrival of the new, vaccine-resistant Omicron variant has blown this strategy out of the water. The current policy leads not only to an endless cycle of newer, more dangerous variants, but to mounting deaths, as newer variants evade old vaccines.

Like the Macron government, RP ignores these epidemiological realities. Earlier this month, French Health Minister Olivier Véran told *Sud Ouest*: “Despite the Omicron variant, our current strategy remains unchanged ... vaccination, both initial and booster, social distancing and wearing masks.”

Similarly, referring to the Omicron variant, RP wrote: “To prevent the birth of variants and their spread as well as to limit the epidemic rebound and support vaccine measures that protect the population against serious forms, it is essential to demand free tests.” However, a policy of free testing and vaccination was already employed and led to tens of millions of cases and millions of deaths, even before the Omicron variant emerged.

When it does have differences with Macron’s policy, these come from the right. Earlier this year, RP called on the trade unions to join far-right protests against Macron’s “health pass” and demanded the early reopening of universities. It utilizes libertarian anti-vaccination arguments, implying that individuals have a right to refuse vaccines even if they thus endanger others. This signifies that on essential questions, RP is united with the French ruling class: No lockdowns and no eradication of the virus.

This position reflects the Morenoite’s orientation toward middle-class layers and union bureaucrats. This social layer is far more concerned about the damage public health measures would deal to their stock market portfolios and to the corporate profits that pay the budgets of the trade union bureaucracies than about saving human lives.

While RP denounced lockdowns as “authoritarian,” the real authoritarianism is that of corporations and governments forcing workers into factories and their children into schools while a deadly and highly infectious virus spreads freely.

In opposition to this, the *Parti de l’égalité socialiste* (PES), the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in France, fights for a working class policy of elimination of the virus. The way forward is a fight to end mass death. This requires a conscious break with the reactionary politics of the pseudo-left, and the building of rank-and-file committees in every workplace and school to fight the Macron government and its political satellites for a scientific health policy.



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