

Romanian doctors blamed for health crisis fuelled by the ruling class “forever COVID” policy

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Romania has in recent years become a darling of western think tanks and war planners. Its brutal workplaces legislation, back to work policies and poverty wages have fuelled a record economic “recovery,” as the vast majority of workers struggle to provide basic necessities and have been hit with the highest inflation in the EU. The political establishment, united around a PSD (Social Democratic Party)-led Grand Coalition Government, has helped propel the country to the forefront of the war preparations against Russia.

2024 is a year with four rounds of elections in Romania, in which the bourgeois parties and media have barred any mention of the pressing issues confronting the working population: the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to wreak havoc on the country’s decrepit health infrastructure, and the looming threat of an all-out war against Russia.

A situation at the Pantelimon Hospital Intensive Care ICU unit, which first emerged in April, threatens to lift the veil of silence around the catastrophic state of the country’s health infrastructure, fuelled by the ruling class’ “forever COVID” policy now in place internationally. The medical care director, following a complaint from a nurse, alerted authorities that 20 people had died in the ICU unit in the space of less than 72 hours. The stated suspicion was that doctors had purposely tampered with the dosage of Norepinephrine, a compound used to maintain the blood pressure of severely ill patients.

Three separate medical investigations found no wrongdoing on the part of medical staff. At the time, PSD Health Minister Rafila condemned the revelations as “endangering trust in medical personnel.” No mention was made in the investigations and subsequent coverage of the dire state of the healthcare system. The dramatic

number of deaths was quickly brushed off, despite revelations by former employees and patients’ rights groups that high mortality in the hospital had persisted for a long time and a mobile morgue unit had been parked inside the courtyard for months.

In fact, as the summer months approached, a COVID surge observed throughout the world intensified the catastrophic situation in Romania’s hospitals. As the Romanian health system has evolved, after years of dilapidation, fund cuts and outright closures, a few mammoth units throughout the country shoulder the vast majority of serious cases. These hospitals experience a severe shortage of personnel and are rife with nosocomial (hospital-acquired) infections. Workers are faced with grueling schedules, as repeated rounds of austerity measures are making new hires very difficult.

During the summer, another major hospital in the capital, the University Emergency Hospital of Bucharest (SUUB), experienced an almost complete collapse, as COVID spread unchecked among patients and caregivers. In recent months, the ICU unit at Pantelimon hospital was holding up to 40 cases from its normal capacity of 25 beds.

At the beginning of August, prosecutors ordered the arrest of Mirela P?iu? and Maria Miron, two young doctors from the hospital’s ICU unit, charging them with conspiracy and murder. An intense media campaign was started by the prosecutors, with details from the case either leaked or read directly by the state office. The two doctors were paraded in handcuffs, and their full names and images were published in the press. Private conversations with family members in which they grapple both with the seriousness of the cases and with the threat of prosecution were “leaked” and misused in the media. A parallel campaign was started on far-right social media

channels, connecting the critical care doctors to pandemic conspiracy theories.

Prosecutors have singled out the case of a 54-year-old with a complex pathology, who they claimed was intentionally killed by a reduction of the norepinephrine level. As numerous experts in the field have since explained, the reduction in that case would have been correct. The two doctors were arrested for 30 days on August 8, but released on August 20 by an appeals court.

Health providers came out in solidarity with the arrested doctors. A wildcat strike by workers on the Pantelimon ICU unit, who threatened to resign, was stopped by a visit of the health minister, who falsely promised to support them. In reality, the PSD politician is hiding behind the police case, vowing to “respect the investigators’ findings” in what is a “purely criminal case.”

Serban Bubenek, chief of the Romanian Society of Anesthesia and Intensive Care (SRATI), categorically stated that the two doctors acted correctly and that “murder is absolutely ruled out.” SRATI has asked for the intervention of the ombudsman, for “an analysis of the way in which the right to the presumption of innocence was respected for the persons accused and arrested in the Sf. Pantelimon Hospital file.”

The Romanian College of Physicians (CMR) publicly slammed the Higher Council of Forensic Medicine (CSML), the expertise body tied to the prosecutor’s office. The CSML had issued a highly unusual public statement claiming a “99% probability that the death occurred when it did because of the lowering of the norepinephrine level.” The CMR said that the CSML’s statement “gravely violated the doctors’ rights to a fair trial ... and made an impermissible condemnation in the public space of the doctors under investigation.”

More than 80 Romanian intensivist physicians working in France signed an open letter expressing solidarity with the doctors and detailing some of the medical and legal challenges of critical care medicine.

There remains a large discrepancy between the lack of any evidence of wrongdoing, and the vindictiveness of the prosecutors and the media’s campaign. The “strictly criminal case” is in reality an attack on healthcare workers. The sometimes-unstated conclusion is that the high death count at the hospital is due to the doctors’ criminal actions against their patients, in a bid to “make the unit more effective” and clear the ICU beds for critical cases from the emergency room. The doctors are demonized, accused in the media of “selecting which patient gets to live or die,” with prosecutors calling one of

them “the grim reaper.”

Designed to obscure and strifle a discussion of the real issues involved, the case is in reality a terrible self-indictment of a criminal ruling class. The fact, recognized by the court, that doctors are faced with “making the unit more effective,” in order to prevent deaths on the ER floor, is the result of the “forever COVID” policies and the resulting healthcare collapse. The most vulnerable sections of the population are “falling by the wayside,” in the words of Dr. Anthony Fauci, former Director of the (US) National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, as a result of deliberate policies implemented throughout all the world.

While large hospitals such as the Pantelimon and SUUB are on the verge of collapse, pediatric wards are now full of patients year-round. In line with developments across the world, cases of whooping cough and measles, epidemic diseases affecting children, have increased dramatically in recent months.

The judicial hounding of the two Romanian healthcare providers is part of an international turn of the ruling class toward lawlessness and authoritarian forms of rule, as its policies of mass death, genocide and war are increasingly incompatible with the maintenance of democratic rights.

The prosecution of the two doctors is intended to pollute public life, empower fascistic forces and browbeat healthcare workers into submission. Workers at the hospital are reporting a deluge of threats and harassment, while the life partner of one of the arrested doctors, himself a critical care physician, attempted to take his own life.

Throughout 2023 and into this year, healthcare workers have initiated workplace struggles against the disastrous conditions in hospitals. The union federations Sanitas and Solidaritatea Sanitara, supported by pseudo-left groups like GAS (Socialist Action Group), have worked with the government to block impending strikes.

It is critical that healthcare workers across Romania take up the struggle to build their own rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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