

Macron government denounces scientists for “intervening” in pandemic response

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In a press conference yesterday afternoon, French Health Minister Olivier Véran announced that the government would likely be compelled to announce stricter lockdown measures to face a continued acceleration in the spread of the pandemic. Véran admitted that the nationwide curfew from 6 p.m. had failed to reverse the spread of the virus, and the more contagious variants of the virus, principally the one first identified in the UK, have become established across France.

Macron’s spokesperson, Gabriel Attal, stated yesterday that a decision will be taken by “the end of the week.” The curfew was implemented to prevent a national lockdown that would impact upon corporate profits through the closure of schools and non-essential workplaces. For weeks, the Macron government has rejected demands from the scientific community and health care professionals for a lockdown.

Macron had been due to speak on Wednesday, in what had been widely reported to be an announcement of a limited lockdown in which schools and workplaces would all remain open. The speech was cancelled on Wednesday afternoon, with reports that he would not speak before at least Saturday.

This week, Macron has released a series of increasingly open denunciations of scientists’ calls, including from his own chief scientific adviser Jean-François Delfraissy, for lockdowns. “The president has had enough of this automatic and robotic manner of managing the crisis. He wants new solutions,” a top legislator in Macron’s party told RTL radio anonymously on Wednesday.

The same day, *Le Monde* published comments of Macron adviser Stéphane Séjourné, who denounced what he called the “uncontrolled and suffocating—because sometimes

contradictory—interventions of scientists” into the debate on coronavirus policy. “This permanent escalation in the media makes the public debate hysterical,” he added.

Séjourné said that “scientists are not there to make policy. They must clarify the decisions of the public powers, not clarify themselves. This mixing of roles has to stop.”

In other words: the role of scientists is not to warn the public about dangers they face and outline a scientifically-based response. It is to provide advice to the government, and, when the government proceeds to ignore scientific warnings in defence of the interests of the corporate elite, to be quiet and acquiesce to everything.

Four days earlier, Macron denounced in a press conference “this kind of incessant tracking of errors; we have become a nation of 66 million prosecutors. That is not how we face a crisis or move forward.”

Séjourné’s comments were more immediately in response to Delfraissy, who had announced in a television interview with BFMTV on Sunday evening that the UK variant was identified in “7-9 percent” of positive cases examined “in the Paris region, and possibly other regions.” He said, “we will probably have to go to a new lockdown.”

By Tuesday, after being lectured by Macron, Delfraissy gave an interview to *Libération*, stating that there was no immediate rush to impose a lockdown, and that a decision could be delayed until the end of the week.

The government’s attack on scientists is a conscious and deliberate effort to promote right-wing anti-lockdown forces. It takes place as far-right riots spread in the Netherlands against COVID-19 restrictions, and the attempted coup d’état by American fascists

instigated by US President Trump on January 6, whose promotion of fascists had been concentrated on attacks on even the most minimal restrictions against the pandemic.

Macron himself, who praised the fascist dictator Pétain as a “great soldier” in 2018, is continuously working to promote the extreme right by whipping up of anti-Muslim hysteria. At the beginning of January, *Le Monde* revealed that his adviser, Bruno Roger-Petit, had met with the neo-fascist Marion Maréchal Le Pen, the niece of Marine Le Pen.

In his press conference yesterday, Véran was forced to admit that the government’s policy has failed to stop the virus’ spread. There are now more than 20,000 cases each day, while this figure has risen by 10 percent each week. “The last two weeks, there have been more urgent cases at the hospital than the number of people able to leave,” Véran said.

“The lessons we have drawn from the countries where the variants have circulated earlier and harder than here are that they have caused a strong epidemic wave, stronger than the preceding ones, given the contagiousness of these variants. The fact that they are spreading in our country leads one to think that the curfew and the totality of restrictions were useful but probably not sufficient.”

In Britain, where the more contagious strain is dominant nationally, the seven-day rolling average of daily deaths is more than 1,200. In France, more than 300 people are dying every day. The number of intensive care patients is at more than 3,000, the same level as at the end of October when a limited lockdown was announced.

In an interview on Sunday, Education Minister Jean-Michel Blanquer insisted that the government would seek to keep schools open as long as possible, even if a third lockdown is announced. Schools are being used as holding pens, so that parents can continue to work. The trade unions have opposed any action by teachers for the closure of schools.

Macron’s policy effectively has the support of the entire French political establishment. To the extent that they have said anything at all, the Socialist Party (PS) and the Republicans (LR) have focused their criticism of the government on its failure to confer with them in its decision-making. None of the parties or trade unions are opposed to the de facto “herd immunity” policy

Macron is pursuing, allowing the virus to spread so that corporate profit-making can continue.



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