

Spain ends confinement, moving to “new normal” as COVID-19 cases rise

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On Tuesday, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez announced his government’s plans for a gradual end to COVID-19 confinement measures in Spain, even as new infections mount. The return-to-work policy is part of the criminal drive of the international financial aristocracy to resume production and send workers back to work, risking the health and the lives of thousands.

On Tuesday evening, Sánchez outlined his government’s plan under the name “Transition Plan to a New Normal.”

“The only target is to reach the new normal,” he said, claiming that his plan consists of an “asymmetrical, gradual and flexible” de-escalation.

The plan was developed by the “Coronavirus Management Technical Committee.” Chaired by Sánchez, it included four deputy prime ministers, six ministers and four senior officials of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and of the petty-bourgeois populist Podemos party. From now on, Sánchez declared, this committee will be called the “De-escalation Technical Committee,” as if the raging pandemic were over.

The plan sets four stages for lifting lockdown measures, without setting clear dates. It begins on May 4 and lasts until the end of June. Sánchez explained that phase 0 will begin on May 4. It involves reopening small businesses such as restaurants that can offer takeaway and hairdressers. Customers will have to call and make an appointment to be able to buy products.

Phase 1 will allow “the partial reopening of small businesses under strict safety measures, but not large shopping malls, where big crowds could form.” Restaurants will open terraces without exceeding 30 percent of normal capacity, and hotels and tourist apartments, excluding common areas, will open also.

Churches will open at 30 percent of usual capacity. Retail premises will select times dedicated to serving people over 65, who are at special risk from COVID-19.

In Phase 2, restaurants will be able to open indoors, at a third of normal capacity and with service only at tables. Cinemas, theatres, auditoriums and exhibition halls will also open, limited to one third of their capacity. Indoor cultural performances will be possible but limited to fewer than 50 people and less than a third of normal capacity.

Schools will not fully reopen until September.

In Phase 3, general mobility and transport will be made more flexible. In retail premises, capacity will be limited to 50 percent and a minimum distance of two metres between people will be imposed. In restaurants, there will be further easing, and beaches may be open.

Sánchez said that “By the end of June, as a country we will be in the new normal if the evolution of the epidemic is under control in all territories.”

The “New Normal” is not based on science, nor on mass demands to lift confinement, but on the reckless drive to operate business as usual and extract profits from workers amid a pandemic. Millions more workers, who have sheltered at home due to the lock-down, will now be forced to return to work. Millions more are being told, incorrectly, that it will be safe to be outside.

Sánchez claimed, “If we have to choose between prudence and risk, we opt for prudence. ... Science still doesn’t know a lot of things about this virus. As such, we are facing something that we don’t know, and that is why we have to be cautious.”

This is a political lie: the PSOE-Podemos policy has nothing to do with “prudence” or being “cautious.” The truth is there is no need to lift confinement when the pandemic is nowhere near controlled.

Spain has suffered the world's third-highest death toll after the United States and Italy. After more than six weeks of lockdown, the Health Ministry reported 301 more COVID-19 deaths and 1,308 new infections yesterday. In total, Madrid has identified 210,773 infections via polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests, and 23,822 people have died. This makes Spain the second country with the highest number of cases after the US, which has about a third of the global total, according to Johns Hopkins University data, with a million infections.

The Spanish government even failed to protect health care workers at the forefront of the struggle against COVID-19. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) reports 20 percent of registered coronavirus cases in Spain are health care workers.

Significantly, the so-called "De-escalation Technical Committee" has admitted that it has still not come up with indicators to assess the "de-escalation" of the disease.

Yesterday, Fernando Simón, an epidemiologist serving as director of the Centre for Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies of the Health Ministry and the only scientist in the Committee, said de-escalation "will not be based on unique indicators and predetermined thresholds," as it depends on "many factors."

Acting as Sánchez's propaganda machine, the press has uncritically parroted the "new normal" thesis. Typical in the liberal media are articles such as "When can I go to a friend's house? And visit my parents? This what we know of the new social life" (*El País*), or "This is how de-escalation will be in different stages for bars, restaurants and beaches" (*Público*) or "Seeing family or friends, having a beer or going to the beach: when can you start doing these things in de-escalation?" (*Eldiario.org*). *El País* also worries about "How Spain's coronavirus lockdown could be endangering wildlife."

The Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and social-democratic General Union of Labour (UGT) unions, which enforce the PSOE-Podemos's criminal back-to-work policy, supported Sánchez's latest measures. Mimicking his words, CCOO General Secretary Unai Sordo said: "The return to activity should be governed by prudence to prevent a rebound

in COVID-19."

A UGT statement declares that "once the magnitude of the health crisis we face subsides, as it seems in the last days, we should proceed to returning the activity of those production processes that are still paralysed, in order to mitigate, as far as possible, the damage that this pandemic is causing to our economy."

As usual, Podemos was the biggest cheerleader of the policy. Podemos parliament spokesperson Pablo Echenique described the plan as "prudent and sensible" and hailed it for going "in the right direction."

These forces speak not for the working class, which they are recklessly endangering, but for the financial aristocracy. Yesterday, Spain's main stock exchange rebounded 3.21 percent and crossed the 7,000-point threshold it had fallen through earlier this year.

On the other side stand workers, who oppose reckless lifting of confinement measures. A poll published by *El País* reported that 59 percent of those asked thought that the lockdown should be maintained as it is for the time being.



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