

Podemos pushes “back to work” as Spanish army expects new COVID-19 outbreak

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11 May 2020

Spain’s Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government continues to lift confinement measures, even as internal Spanish army documents forecast this will provoke new outbreaks of the disease. The state is placing the lives of millions of workers going back to work in danger, putting corporate profits above workers’ lives.

Today, over half Spain’s population will move to the so-called Phase 1 of the government’s deconfinement plan. Those living in harder-hit areas still in Phase 0 will have stricter restrictions on their movements, as under the previous confinement policy. But those in Phase 1 will be able to visit family members, attend funerals, go shopping, go to restaurants, hold meetings of up to 10 people, and open hotels, tourist accommodations and places of worship.

This will inevitably lead to a major resurgence of the virus, according to an “Informative note on long-term epidemic prediction” produced by the Technical Unit of Support for Decision-Making of the Spanish army, in charge of the Army’s operational research. The document has circulated among the top brass of the Spanish army, and was seen by *Confidencial Digital*.

According to the document, “there will be two more waves of the epidemic” by 2021. By the fall, a “second wave of COVID-19” is likely, and “possibly this will happen again the following winter.”

This is the first official Spanish document to acknowledge the possibility of large-scale resurgence of the contagion. Previously, Fernando Simón, an epidemiologist serving as director of the Centre for Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies of the Health Ministry, had warned of the “risk” of new outbreaks while defending deconfinement measures.

This scenario is based on the Spanish army’s untested and possibly overoptimistic assessment that during the summer, “the number of infections will

decrease” as “the heat will slow down the expansion, but it won’t stop it completely.” If this assessment proves wrong, the number of the sick and of the dying could rise even more rapidly.

The army’s document speaks with undisguised contempt for the lives of the working masses. It states, “the problem is not so much the number of severe cases or deaths, but rather that they all accumulate at the same time again provoking the collapse of health care services.”

That is, the confirmed deaths of 26,621 people in Spain, 151,882 across Europe and nearly 300,000 worldwide are not a “problem.” Nor has the collapse of health services and the mass infections of health personnel provoked the Spanish state machine or the PSOE-Podemos government to increase health spending. If truth be told, the central concern in state circles is that a collapse of health care services could trigger an uncontrollable eruption of anger in the working class against the callousness and irresponsibility of the ruling capitalist aristocracy.

The army document endorses the Social-Darwinist “herd immunity” policy envisaging the infection of tens of millions with COVID-19. This could lead to hundreds of thousands of deaths in Spain alone. The policy has been advocated by capitalist governments worldwide, and perhaps most crudely summarized by a UK government adviser: “herd immunity, protect the economy, and if that means some pensioners die, too bad.”

The Spanish army document claims that future waves of infection will be less “extensive or lethal” because those who have already been infected will be immune to the virus, though scientists are divided on this question, and because of “new treatments” and a future vaccine. As a result, “emerging problems will have less

impact.” It claims without evidence that the “more infected in the current wave, the less contagious will it be in the next wave.” It admits, however, that “there will never be 100 percent immunity.”

It confidently predicts that a second wave “will not be like the first, because strong confinement measures will be taken immediately and the means and treatments will have improved.” Even if this were to be true, this would only underscore the enormous cost of European governments’ decisions not to promptly take confinement measures during the initial outbreak.

The way the ruling class prioritizes profits over lives emerged last week when the Madrid regional government, ruled by the right-wing Popular Party, appealed to the central government to scale down the confinement, passing from Phase 0 to 1. That petition was made after meetings with “different economic sectors,” according to regional premier Isabel Díaz Ayuso. She overrode recommendations to the contrary by the regional director general of Public Health, Yolanda Fuentes, who resigned to signal her disagreement. Madrid is the epicentre of Spain’s coronavirus pandemic.

While cynically claiming to value human life, Ayuso demanded it be balanced against profits: “We have to combine life, which for me has always been the most important thing, with starting to reactivate the economy, because if we do not, we will have a lot of problems, including public order.”

On Friday, Deputy Prime Minister and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias cynically criticized Ayuso, stating: “The people are scandalized that some try to gain political positions playing with something as serious as saving lives.”

The truth is Ayuso was openly stating the policy that the PSOE-Podemos government, with the collaboration of the trade unions CCOO and UGT, are implementing. Moreover, Iglesias and the PSOE-Podemos government are just as much a political tool of big business as Ayuso and the PP.

In April, the government announced the back-to-work policy a day after Rafael Domenech, from BBVA bank’s research team, told eldiario.org he demanded “undertaking of massive testing in the population to see who is already immune to the virus, so they are ready to go to work and restart the economy.” A day earlier, Ana Botín, executive chairman of Santander Group,

told a group of shareholders that she had asked the government “to plan, as soon as possible or even sooner, the return to work of younger people and those that are immune.”

The PSOE-Podemos government is now forging ties with the right-wing Citizens party. Last Wednesday, the government managed to save its fourth extension of the state of alarm, guaranteeing centralized control of the pandemic until May 24, thanks to the support of Citizens. The terms of the deal are virtually like those to include Citizens in the ruling coalition—including attending weekly meetings to consider progress. Iglesias thanked Citizens, calling them the “civilised right.”

This is a political fraud. “Civilised right” parties like Citizens run regional governments of Madrid and Andalusia and rule thanks to the support of the fascistic Vox party, which openly hails the record of 20th-century Spain’s fascist dictator, the mass murderer Francisco Franco. Citizens is also famous for its austerity programme, and for its poisonous promotion of anti-Catalan chauvinism and Spanish nationalism.

Podemos’ growing alignment with the right reveals the class character of their policy. Like its sister in Greece, the Syriza (the “Coalition of the Radical Left”) government, which imposed 4 years of brutal austerity with the far-right Independent Greeks, its policies are based on fraudulent theories of “left populism.” A party formed in 2014 by Stalinist and Pabloite middle-class youth who came to prominence during the *indignados* protests of 2011, Podemos now openly defends bailouts for big business, austerity and sending the police to suppress strikes and protests.

Iglesias concisely summed up his party’s orientation to save capitalism and the wealth of the ruling class when he told the *Financial Times* of London that his government guarantees that “the market economy is protected much better, and it guarantees certain minimum levels of demand and welfare.”



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