

Madrid hospitals collapsing amid Covid-19 resurgence in Europe

Alejandro López and Alex Lantier
22 September 2020

Three months after the Spanish government ended lockdowns amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the resurgence of the virus is again swamping Madrid's hospitals. Health authorities report 90 percent of beds in Madrid intensive care wards are occupied; 139 people died of Covid-19 there last week.

These events are a warning to workers across Europe and internationally: the premature ending of lockdowns is leading to catastrophe. In Spain, there have been 31,428 new Covid-19 cases found and 168 deaths just since Friday. In Madrid, the number of cases has been multiplied by 73 since July, rising from 9 to 659 per 100,000 inhabitants. Similar surges are taking place in every European country, and many European cities are only weeks behind Madrid in the spread of the virus.

Working class neighborhoods in the south of the city are hardest-hit by the virus, with double the average rate of infection: Puente de Vallecas has 1,280 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, Villaverde 1,208 and Usera 1,198. Many essential workers highly exposed to Covid-19 live in these areas, where many large families live together in small, cramped apartments.

One doctor from the Doce de Octubre hospital in southern Madrid, which has begun canceling scheduled surgeries to deal with the Covid-19 surge, told the press: "The situation is beginning to be unsustainable. We are no longer short of protective equipment or respirators, but we are short of hands. The workforce is very depleted. There is a lack of doctors, nurses, administrators. We have warned of it over and over again, but no one listens."

Not only are hospitals collapsing amid the influx of patients, but contact tracers and testing centers are falling far behind in identifying and testing all those exposed to Covid-19 patients.

The right-wing Popular Party (PP) government of the Madrid region, led by Isabel Ayuso, admitted this weekend that its own calculations show it must double the

number of contact tracers, but will take a month to hire them all. "Currently we have over 800 contact tracers," Madrid health counselor Enrique Ruiz Escudero said. "The objective is to have 1,100 by the end of the month and arrive sometime in October at 1,500, so we can do the work of investigating both the infected and their contacts, as well as daily follow-up."

On Friday, Ayuso announced a 14-day order for "restriction of mobility and reduction of activity" in 37 Madrid districts housing 850,000 people, one-eighth of Madrid's population. Ayuso also claimed health officials would administer 1 million Covid-19 antigen tests there. Yesterday, Madrid regional officials began working with Spanish national police and Civil Guard under the authority of Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos coalition government to enforce the restriction orders.

Ayuso's "restriction" order is not a quarantine or lockdown policy aiming to stop the spread of Covid-19 by ensuring social distancing and letting non-essential workers shelter at home. In fact, it declares workers can still be required to travel "for work, medical reasons or access to education and to then return to their residences; to assist elderly, minor or dependent persons; to access banking, security, or administrative entities; to attend examinations or any other necessity that has priority, is urgent or arises from *force majeure*."

It is, in fact, primarily a ban on workers and youth socializing while they are not at work or school, but otherwise forcing them to expose themselves to Covid-19 to make profits for the corporations and banks.

Ayuso is applying in Madrid the European Union's (EU) Covid-19 policies enacted by the PSOE-Podemos government. The EU has adopted €750 billion in corporate bailouts, backed by a €1.25 trillion European Central Bank (ECB) bank bailout, to enrich corporations and investors. These bailouts are predicated on ending social distancing and returning working class youth to

classrooms so their parents can return to work, and profits can keep flowing to bailed-out corporations.

PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez met yesterday with Ayuso to repeat that there would be no lockdown or quarantine measures. While Ayuso provoked widespread disgust with fascistic comments blaming Covid-19 on “the lifestyles of immigrants here,” as well as by predicting that “practically all children” will contract Covid-19 after returning to school, Sanchez held a joint press conference with her. Standing side by side with Ayuso, he said: “Those hoping to see confrontation here will go home empty-handed.”

Sanchez ruled out invoking of a state of alarm, the juridical mechanism used to impose a quarantine or lockdown order in Spain, to reverse the rising curve of infections: “There are many ways of slowing the curve that do not require declaring the state of alarm.” Backing Ayuso, Sanchez added: “This is an epidemiological, not an ideological battle.”

Ayuso insisted non-essential work and students’ return to in-person classes would continue. She said, “Madrid has never stopped, and our community has continued working like everywhere else.” She hailed the national police and Civil Guards: “We need our security forces to help us apply our measures.”

Such politically criminal policies are provoking explosive anger among workers. According to the state’s own CIS poll, 58.3 percent of Spaniards want “stricter” isolation measures, and 56.8 percent do not trust state policy. Such sentiment came out in *La Sexta* television’s interview of Flora, a nurse who has worked for 15 years in Vallecas, that went viral online.

She said there is “no need to be genius” to see what is happening: “There are people who work, the working class; there are those who commute, the working class; there are those who can’t work remotely, the working class. Who lives with six to eight people in 45 square-meter apartments? The class that lives in Vallecas, Carabanchel or Usera.” She added that “you don’t need to know much about public health” to see why working class areas have the highest infection rates.

The only way to halt a devastating resurgence of the virus that could claim hundreds of thousands of lives in Spain, and millions across Europe, is for the working class to mobilize in a general strike against the back-to-work and back-to-school policies. Lockdowns are critical to establish social distancing, let non-essential workers shelter at home, and halt the spread of Covid-19. Massive financial resources are required to provide workers and

small business owners full pay while sheltering at home and to support the critical health sector.

An integral part of a struggle to prepare general strike action is the fight to mobilize left-wing opposition among workers to the PSOE and the “left populist” Podemos party, which is complicit in Sanchez’s murderous policies. A general strike inevitably entails a struggle to bring down the PSOE-Podemos government in unity with workers opposing the homicidal Covid-19 policies of capitalist governments across Europe.

For several days, thousands of protesters have gathered in the evenings in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol square to protest Ayuso’s reactionary policies. These actions pose very starkly the political issues facing the working class in the struggle with the PSOE-Podemos government amid the Covid-19 pandemic.

Local Podemos and trade union officials have enforced these protests, called by Madrid neighborhood associations in areas hit by Ayuso’s “restriction” order, denouncing it as “totally unacceptable, useless and clearly tainted by segregationism” and “classism.”

In fact, Ayuso’s refusal to let workers shelter at home is worked out with the Sanchez government, of which Podemos is an integral part. Nor do Podemos officials call for a shelter-at-home policy, but only for “more contact tracers, lab personnel and support for Primary Care centers.” Thus they aim to create conditions to railroad workers and students back to work and school, cynically claiming they are doing the best they can, while implementing policies that spread the virus.

This underscores that the way forward for the working class against the pandemic is to build its own independent organizations of struggle and fight to bring down the PSOE-Podemos government.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact