

Spain's PSOE-Podemos regime rejects lock-downs as COVID-19 soars

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9 November 2020

As COVID-19 rips across Spain, the Podemos-PSOE (Spanish Socialist Party) government continues to reject measures to safeguard the lives of workers and their families. Having already denied requests from regional administrations to authorise a shelter-at-home policy, it is insisting that this policy is neither possible nor necessary.

Last Tuesday, in a press conference for the Ministry of Health, Fernando Simón, director of the Centre for the Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies, made this criminal policy clear: “What we have right now in Spain is not a [stay-at-home] lock-down, and this will probably not be necessary.”

He continued: “If we carry out a real and full confinement and nobody leaves their house for any reason, within around 15 days we would have this under control, or perhaps within a month. But this is impossible. There are people who need to work, to buy things, who need to leave... Total confinement is impossible.”

“If the objective is to completely eliminate transmission,” he added, “forget it, it is impossible.”

The priorities of the ruling class are clear: even if a lock-down could largely eliminate the virus, it would rather see mass contagion and death in order to ensure the working class keeps producing profits. Simón's comments came as Spain registered its highest fatality total in a single day since the end of May, with 368 coronavirus deaths last Thursday.

Around 20,000 new cases are being recorded daily in Spain, far more than in the spring. As an average of 200-250 die of the disease every day, estimates suggest that at least 7,000 coronavirus deaths will occur in November alone in Spain. As of Monday, the official death toll stood at 39,345, with more than 1.4 million people so far becoming infected with COVID-19 across

the country.

It is widely acknowledged, including in major corporate media, that these official figures massively understate the impact of the virus. Last week, the National Institute of Statistics (INE) released a document showing that there have been 65,892 excess deaths recorded since March, as overwhelmed hospitals struggled to treat the influx of COVID-19 patients.

New estimates from the Spanish Secretary of State for Social Rights also shine a clearer light on the true scale of the devastation wrought by the pandemic. According to these figures, released on Friday, approximately 43,697 people died of coronavirus in the first wave of the pandemic alone (up to 23 June), far higher than the official death toll of 28,148 recorded during this period.

Particularly badly hit were care homes, where an estimated 20,268 vulnerable or elderly people died from the disease during the first wave. This means that between 47 and 50 percent of the total COVID-19 deaths registered in that period were in these residential facilities.

During the pandemic's March-April peak, the virus swept through care homes in Spain and across Europe, outpacing the ability of care workers to provide for and safeguard residents. In March, some elderly residents in Madrid were left without care and food for days due to staff absences and impossible working conditions. The military, which belatedly intervened to relieve care homes, found 23 dead in one care home in the Spanish capital, including two nuns who had been providing care.

Mortality rates for those infected with COVID-19 in care homes were around 13 percent in March, as the virus devastated these facilities, rising to 22 percent for those over the age of 80. While coronavirus mortality

rates in care homes have fallen since March, they are still estimated at a very high 7 percent.

Residential homes are once again emerging as epicentres of infection in Spain, with 137 of the 1,526 outbreaks recorded in Spain in the week from 29 October being in these facilities—affecting 2,336 people. José Augusto García, President of the Spanish Society of Geriatrics and Gerontology, told Canal 24 horas: “Outbreaks in elderly residential homes are 12 times as frequent and three times as strong as in the population as a whole.”

Health care workers are also bearing the brunt of the pandemic, with 76,431 infections among this section of the workforce since the start of the pandemic, or 5.75 percent of the total. There were 63 health care worker deaths up until 5 June.

Meanwhile, according to public sector union Central Sindical Independiente y de Funcionarios (CSIF), the Spanish health care system shed 17,548 jobs over September and October, just as the second wave of infections began to pick up speed. The majority of these employees were temporary workers hired to fill gaps over the summer holiday period. Around 28 percent of all health care workers in Spain are on temporary contracts.

Agitation against measures to combat the pandemic is being led by the Spanish bourgeoisie, who are demanding that the government keep workers on the job and keep schools open. Speaking to *El País*, Antonio Garamendi, president of the Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (Spanish Confederation of Employers’ Organisations) stated that a new lockdown “would be a disaster for the economy, companies and employment.”

Echoing this view, a banker bluntly told the same newspaper: “The fewer confinements the better. We can’t close industry or schools, because this means that parents would have to stay at home with their children and the economy would not function. It would be a true catastrophe.”

Fraudulently claiming that lock-down measures implemented in March had no effect, a representative of a Spanish energy group told *El País*: “We don’t believe that confinement is a good idea. We have seen the results from March and its almost non-existent effect. We believe that before applying [lock-down measures] we should exhaust every possible solution so

as to avoid completely paralysing the economy.”

Even as the PSOE-Podemos government continues to endanger workers’ lives at the behest of the Spanish and international bourgeoisie—justifying their criminal refusal to implement substantive measures to combat the pandemic with lying claims that the economy cannot afford it—they have been able to open the coffers of the state to hand out massive bailouts to giant corporations.

Last week, the Spanish cabinet agreed to their first massive state rescue package since the start of the pandemic, pledging to bail out Air Europa to the tune of €475 million. This state aid will see the third-largest Spanish airline (after Iberia and Vueling) receiving €240 million in participatory loans and another €235 in ordinary loans, to be paid back over six years.

The bailout will be overseen by state-owned industrial holding company SEPI (State Society of Industrial Participation), which will have the right to appoint two representatives to the company’s advisory board and will have to authorise any planned workforce restructuring by the airline.

The livelihoods of the airline’s nearly 3,000 workers now hang in the balance, with Air Europa refusing to reveal the details of its supposed “viability plan” to its employees, according to pilots union SEPLA. The state bailout will be predicated on massive attacks on jobs and conditions at Air Europa.



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