

Spain's defence chief resigns amid mounting anger over COVID-19 vaccine theft

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Spain's Chief of Staff General Miguel Angel Villarroya resigned this weekend as anger mounts among workers at Spanish generals, royalty and politicians who obtained COVID-19 vaccines without medical justification. Vaccines are now suddenly and inexplicably running out for front-line health workers.

On Friday, *El Confidencial Digital* leaked that Villarroya and several other top officers recently received the first dose of the vaccine out of turn, skipping protocols. Villarroya resigned Saturday.

It is the first time a chief of staff has resigned since the position was created in 1984. In a statement Saturday, the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government's Ministry of Defence defended Villarroya, saying he "never intended to take advantage of unjustifiable privileges which damaged the image of the Armed Forces and cast doubt on the general's honour." It cynically added that Villarroya "took decisions he thought to be correct" but which "damaged the public image of the Armed Forces."

This scandal exposes the criminal character of the European Union's (EU's) "herd immunity" policy. In the European Union, more than 650,000 people have died of COVID-19 in the past year and over 18 million have been infected. In Spain, nationwide infection rates have soared since late December, with over 40,000 new cases every day, bringing total infections to over 2.5 million. The death toll is now over 80,000.

The ruling class has refused to implement medically necessary lockdown orders in order to continue extracting profits from the working class. Workers are bombarded with endless calls to "sacrifice" to "save the economy," including prominently from Villarroya himself.

As the pandemic began, the PSOE-Podemos government put forward Villarroya, who held regular press conferences alongside the health officials to talk about deploying the army to disinfect buildings, build makeshift hospitals and transport bodies. The army

received unprecedented levels of positive news coverage.

The deployment exposed the disastrous state of the civilian health care system. After decades of privatisation and austerity, it was unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic. The PSOE-Podemos government responded by trying to politically rehabilitate the Spanish army, which is historically associated with neo-colonial wars and fascist violence against the working class.

With his motto "every day is Monday" and his appeals to militarist sentiment, Villarroya told the public that "discipline," "spirit of service" and "sacrifice" were necessary to "defeat" the pandemic. He portrayed the pandemic as a war, saying: "In this irregular and strange war that we have to live through, in which we all have to fight, we are all soldiers."

What Villarroya did not say was that in this "war" the bourgeoisie treated the workers as cannon fodder. While soldiers in World War I were told to jump over the top of trenches in countless fruitless offensives into massed machine gun fire, today millions of workers and youth are packed into trains and trams to go to non-essential work and school. The aim is to ensure that profits continue pouring into the coffers of the banks, at the cost of infecting millions with COVID-19.

Like Spain's wealthy "soldados de cuota" (quota soldiers) in the early 20th century whose families paid large sums to avoid universal military service, today's billionaire parasites, far-right generals and countless corrupt officials skipped the wait-list to save themselves at others' expense. This has provoked outrage.

Tens of thousands tweeted under the hashtag #QueremosLaLista (WeWantTheList), demanding that a public list be drawn of all those in public positions of power that have vaccinated out of turn.

One Twitter user said, "I'm joining WeWantTheList. To use your position in power to jump the priority of vaccinations in COVID-19 is miserable, with no

justification.” Another user said: “They lie to us, they rob us, they privatise, they let us die, WeWantTheList.”

Another demanded of Defence Minister Margarita Robles: “WeWantTheList of the Chiefs of Defence who have taken the vaccine and for you to sack them. With this right-wing Minister [i.e., Robles], these people won’t fall.”

Another Twitter user said: “[T]hey say you should put the second dose to not squander the vaccine. The only way to not squander vaccines is putting a guillotine in each town square. You will be naïve if you think band-aids will conceal this. WeWantTheList”.

Anger is mounting amid revelations that the vaccination campaign is stalling due to vaccine shortages. The PSOE-Podemos government’s COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy specified that from January to March, it would vaccinate 2.5 million people, including nursing home residents and staff, health workers, and people with serious disabilities. It is now rapidly falling behind schedule.

Over the weekend, Spain’s most populous region, Andalusia, halted administration of the vaccine. “We must stop vaccinating on Saturday and Sunday to use the 10 percent” kept as a strategic reserve on Monday and Tuesday, the region’s Health Minister explained Saturday. This followed the Madrid region’s announcement that it was stopping the rollout of the vaccines for front-line health workers fighting COVID-19 because it has run out of vaccines.

The PSOE-Podemos government’s sacking of Villarroya amounts to nothing more than political damage control. Defence Minister Margarita Robles reacted to the scandal on Friday by requesting a report from the chief of defence, the usual procedure to buy time. Only when public anger mounted did Podemos request Villarroya’s head, in a desperate attempt to suppress the scandal.

The PSOE-Podemos government has refused to disclose how many vaccines the army has hoarded and name all vaccinated army officers. Other generals named in *El Confidencial Digital*’s report Friday have remained in their posts: Generals Fernando García González-Valerio, Francisco Braco Carbó, Carlos Prada Larrea, and Francisco Javier Vidal Fernández.

In fact, and as the PSOE and Podemos officials well know, if everyone implicated in hoarding vaccines and skipping vaccination queues had to resign, the entire top echelon of the state would have to be sacked. The PSOE and Podemos are themselves politically implicated in the scandal.

This was implicitly acknowledged by the only public

official who came out to defend Villarroya. Madrid’s Popular Party (PP) mayor, José Luis Almeida, said: “We are in a crisis situation, let’s face it. Those who lead the nation, those who have the responsibility to make decisions for the future, it seems very logical and very reasonable for them to be vaccinated.” Almeida differentiated between the “many cases of politicians” who “should not” have received the dose and those who “have to lead the nation at a crucial moment.” Spain, he cynically concluded, “cannot become leaderless.”

Workers can have no confidence in Podemos, the PSOE or any other faction of the political establishment to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Workers and youth should be warned that the damage control operation will not lessen the right-wing, authoritarian drive of the ruling class. Terrified by mounting mass anger, it will shift further to the right, and the coup-plotting conspiracies of the army general staff and the fascist Vox party will escalate even as the PSOE and Podemos double down on their “herd immunity” policy.

The turn is to the European and international working class. Strikes and protests erupt on a daily basis across Europe as health and postal workers, teachers, other sections of workers and youth mobilize against “herd immunity” policies. Developing this movement requires organizing the workers and youth in rank-and-file safety committees independent of the union bureaucracies and parliamentary parties, and building a political movement for socialism against Podemos, the PSOE, the EU and the capitalist system.



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