

Opposition mounts to Spanish government's refusal to implement coronavirus measures

Alice Summers
27 January 2021

The coronavirus pandemic in Spain is continuing to spiral out of control. Almost every day new grisly records are broken for the number of cases recorded or for the incidence rate within the population.

On Thursday, Spain saw its highest ever number of cases reported in a single day: 44,357. This beat the previous record, set only the day before, of 41,576. Another 42,885 cases were reported on Friday, the second highest figure of the whole pandemic. This brings the grim infection total to 2,499,560, with cases having risen by half a million in only two weeks. This is approximately one percent of the population becoming infected every fortnight.

More than 55,000 people have now died from the virus, according to official statistics, over 2,000 of whom lost their lives in the last week alone—more than 400 on each of the five weekdays when figures are released. Excess death statistics indicate that the real death toll is around 85,000.

The 14-day incidence rate across the country is exploding. Every day since January 15 has marked a new record high. On Friday, this figure shot up to 828.57 per 100,000 people, while six regions (Valencia, Murcia, Extremadura, La Rioja, Castilla y León and Castilla-La Mancha) are reporting staggeringly high incidence rates of between 1,000 and 1,500 cases per 100,000 people.

While infection rates soar, the rollout of the vaccine has proceeded at a glacial pace. As of Friday, only 1.17 million doses of the vaccine had been administered, about 2.5 percent of the total population. While the government has announced its aim to vaccinate 70 percent of the population by summer, at the current rate it will be well into next year before this is achieved, leaving the majority of Spain's inhabitants vulnerable to the virus for many months more.

The Madrid region announced last week that it will stop inoculating frontline health care workers as it has run out of vaccines. Jesús Aguirre, health minister in the region of Andalucía, also announced that no vaccines would be administered over the weekend due to shortages. This came as it was made public that top officials in the central Health Ministry and in the army had skipped the vaccination queue, ultimately leading to the resignation of Chief of Staff General Miguel Angel Villarroja on Saturday.

The blame for this explosion of cases and deaths lies squarely on the shoulders of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, which has refused point-blank to take any serious measures to control the pandemic.

The government has repeatedly insisted in recent weeks that no new lockdown measures will be implemented, with Health Minister Salvador Illa declaring in an interview last Monday, “With the strategy that already worked in October, we can break this wave.” This refers to the government's refusal to impose confinement measures during the peak of the pandemic in the autumn, instead merely implementing curfew measures and closing some shops.

The previous week, he had proclaimed, “At the moment, we do not contemplate any home confinement. We controlled the second wave without home confinement. We will defeat this third wave through co-governance and the current state of alarm, which works.”

So adamant is the nominally “left” government that no measures will be taken to curb the contagion that it refused requests from regional authorities to bring forward curfew measures to 8:00 p.m. Currently the “state of alarm,” which was enacted by the PSOE-Podemos administration last October, allows regional

governments to enforce curfews from 10:00 p.m. at the earliest.

After the region of Castilla y León brought forward its curfew to 8:00 p.m., the central government challenged this decision in the Supreme Court, arguing that it was illegal and in breach of its state of alarm decree. Requests from eight other regions to extend their curfews have also been denied. Although these curfew extensions in and of themselves would have little effect and are largely symbolic, the PSOE-Podemos administration intends to send a clear signal: No additional measures which would impinge on the profit interests of Spanish businesses will be tolerated.

Meanwhile, Fernando Simón, director of the Centre for the Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies, sought to blame the population for the surge in infections and deaths. In a press conference last Monday, he dishonestly claimed that the main source of transmission was in the hospitality sector, and therefore that closing bars, while keeping workers at work and children in schools, is the most effective way to control the virus. “The measure which has had the biggest impact,” he stated, “has been the closure of the inside of bars.”

Cases in schools and universities are also rapidly rising, as the PSOE-Podemos government insisted education facilities reopen after the Christmas break on January 11, despite the explosion of coronavirus cases.

While comprehensive data for the whole country is not available, 65,122 pupils and educators were in confinement in the region of Catalonia alone due to COVID-19, with 10 schools having to close. In Murcia, a region with a far smaller population, around 5,600 students or education staff have either contracted the virus or are in isolation due to suspected contact with an infected person. In the region of Aragon, 34 classrooms in 29 different education centres had to be closed due to the virus, a significant increase over the previous weeks.

In Extremadura, one of the regions worst affected by the current surge in cases, high school students began a strike Monday against the return to in-person education, pointing to the unsafe conditions in schools and the overwhelming of hospitals. The students are demanding that the return to classrooms be delayed by at least a week and that the required resources are allotted to ensure quality online teaching.

Parents of school children in the city of La Línea de la Concepción, bordering the British enclave of Gibraltar, have also begun boycotting schools in opposition to the maintenance of in-person education even as the new, more infectious British strain of the virus runs rampant. Incidence rates in this city have risen to a staggering 2,460 cases per 100,000 inhabitants, likely due to the increased prevalence of the new strain.

With classrooms in the city remaining largely empty due to the parents’ boycott, the local branch of the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) felt compelled to call an indefinite strike beginning Monday across the municipality of Campo de Gibraltar. The CGT has called on all workers in non-university education centres in the municipality—with a population of around 270,000 people—to stop work until further notice. The CGT’s strike call, however, is merely rearguard action designed to keep the growing anger of parents and teachers under their control and will not affect any schools outside of this small municipality.

These actions are being joined by public sector workers across the Canary Islands, with around 3,000-4,000 workers on temporary contracts—despite many of them having worked for the regional government for over 20 years—going out on strike to demand permanent contracts and better conditions.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact