

Spanish Morenoite Izquierda Diario denounces social distancing for COVID-19

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In articles on its web site, *Izquierda Diario*, the Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT), the Morenoite group in Spain, has opposed lockdowns and basic public health measures urgently needed to contain the coronavirus pandemic, which is raging across Spain and Europe. It denounces even limited restrictions imposed by Spain's central and regional governments as an unacceptable encroachment on democratic rights.

In a 20 January article, sarcastically titled "More restrictions, the recipe for confronting the third wave," the CRT rails against social distancing, declaring: "As if it were a tap, they [the PSOE-Podemos government] are limiting our liberties and movements at their will. Measures that, like in March last year, also have a particular focus on working-class neighbourhoods. Once again, they are forcing us into a life of home to work and work to our homes."

"In this way, curfews are an authoritarian and palliative measure," it continues, "which try to obscure the failure of the management of the pandemic. Instead of taking real health measures such as the transfer of private healthcare resources into public management and the contracting of staff in line with the needs of caring for Covid cases as much as with a vaccination plan, they turn to restrictions, repression and the criminalization of the population, and in particular the youth."

Curfews are indeed insufficient as a health policy, but the CRT's denunciations of any collective public health policy involving social distancing as authoritarian repression of its lifestyles is deeply reactionary and cuts across any serious attempt to halt the pandemic.

COVID-19 is devastating Europe and the world, with over 2 million deaths including over 700,000 in Europe. Spain has recorded 2.8 million cases and around 60,000 fatalities, according to official figures, with over 400 deaths recorded every day last week. Excess death statistics indicate that the real death toll is over 85,000.

COVID-19 cases have exploded since the official "save Christmas" campaign in December, which encouraged the population into shops and restaurants to ensure businesses

accrued profits during the holidays. This criminal policy continued in January, as the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government refusing to implement a lockdown even as infections surged. As a result, January saw Spain's highest-ever daily infection figures, with 44,357 new cases on 21 January. Hospitals are on the brink of collapse as intensive care units are swamped.

The CRT's calls for the "transfer of private healthcare resources into public management," a policy it knows full well a PSOE-Podemos government will not implement, are simply a further attempt to distract from its opposition to basic public health measures. Even if more resources were allocated to hospitals, given that there is no treatment for COVID-19 and the limited availability of vaccines, this would not halt the growing wave of deaths.

The CRT is seeking to gloss over their support for this unrestrained "herd immunity" approach with phrasemongering about strengthening health services and rhetorical denunciations of the PSOE-Podemos government. However, the CRT's anti-lock-down position makes it criminally complicit in the PSOE-Podemos government's policy. It has waged a protracted propaganda campaign against measures to control the spread of the virus, echoing demands of the far-right Vox party.

In a separate statement titled "Third wave: an urgent programme of action to prevent a new social crime against the working class," published several days later, the CRT expands on this position. Posturing as critics of PSOE and Podemos, they state:

"They [the government] are prohibiting meetings of more than six people, or even four, but they don't care that we are travelling in the hundreds on public transport. They want us to be in our houses earlier and earlier, but working families cannot stay away from work without losing their salaries during the quarantining of their children. They don't want economic activity to be paralyzed, but they let thousands of companies continue not to provide measures or protocols against the contagion"

But what solution does the CRT propose? Instead of

calling for workers to shelter at home on full pay, and aid to artists and small businesses, the CRT lays out “10 emergency measures.” While appealing for the “reinforcement” of health care, vaccination programs and public transport, and for some basic measures to ensure income, and prevent evictions and dismissals, not one of their 10 measures mentions a shelter-at-home policy.

In fact, in the whole statement, the word “lockdown” (*confinamiento*) is mentioned a single time—as a passing reference to the border closures adopted by certain regional governments in Spain. This omission is not accidental.

The CRT is silent on this because they agree with all the fundamentals of the PSOE-Podemos government’s “herd immunity” strategy. Their tactical criticisms amount to no more than window dressing for their support for keeping workers in work and children in schools, while dishonestly implying that workers’ lives and livelihoods can be safeguarded without a shelter-at-home policy. They aim to contain growing opposition among workers and youth to PSOE-Podemos policies and dissipate it into harmless channels.

This position is not a passing error or confusion of the CRT, but the reflection of material class interests it defends. The CRT speaks for affluent layers of the union bureaucracy and the professional middle class who stand to gain from multi-trillion-euro bank bailouts the European Union (EU) has approved amid the pandemic. Billions of euros are passing through management offices, works councils, and financial markets in which they are invested. But this funding is conditioned on support for the EU’s “herd immunity” policy.

Reflecting its orientation to this corrupt social layer, the CRT works to tie the working class to the union bureaucracy, which has worked systematically to isolate and sell out strikes and protests. Referring at the end of their statement to the call by Spain’s main unions for a “spring of mobilisations” in supposed opposition to austerity measures imposed by the PSOE and Podemos, the CRT makes this perspective explicit.

“The trade union bureaucracy is calling for symbolic mobilisations for the month of February, a totally impotent gesture,” the statement declares. “It is urgent to denounce this complicit policy and demand that the leaderships of the large unions convoke genuine days of struggle for a program of making the capitalists pay for the crisis [and] to prepare the ground for a general strike for the repeal of the labour and pensions reforms .”

Despite correctly noting the complicity of the trade unions in imposing austerity measures and facilitating the ruling elite’s “back-to-work” campaign, the CRT issues no call for a break with these organisations. Instead, they call on the

corrupt union leaderships to come together in opposition to the very policies the union bureaucracies have negotiated with employers and corporate management.

The CRT declares: “For its part, the trade union left, along with critical sections of the CCOO [Workers’ Commissions] and UGT [General Union of Labour], social movements for housing, against energy shut-offs or in defence of public services, and together with the anti-capitalist left, have the responsibility of moving towards organizing solidarity with the struggles taking place, coordinating and supporting the organisation of precarious sectors which are coming into struggle.

“Only this way can we force the union bureaucracies from below to come into struggle for a program for exiting this crisis in favour of the working class,” the statement adds.

These are cynical lies. The way forward for workers in Spain and internationally lies not in appeals to the union bureaucracies, but in mobilising independently of the trade unions, the PSOE-Podemos government and their pseudo-left props in the Morenoite CRT. A strategy of putting pressure on the unions or the nominally “left” parties is a dead-end for the working class.

The International Committee of the Fourth International and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties instead call on workers to form independent rank-and-file safety committees in every workplace and neighbourhood, to fight for an international general strike to enforce a scientific response to the pandemic. An immediate shelter-at-home policy must be imposed, with full pay for all workers affected and genuinely safe conditions must be put in place for all essential workers, under the democratic control of workers themselves.



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