

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government calls for “normalization” of COVID-19

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As COVID-19 continues to spread through Spain, the coalition government of the social-democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) and the “left populist” Podemos party is campaigning to downplay the risks of the virus, calling for its “normalization.”

In a recent speech to a meeting of the Spanish Society of Epidemiology, Fernando Simón, director of the Centre for the Coordination of Health Alerts and Emergencies (CCAES), and one of the PSOE-Podemos government's key advisors during the pandemic, made this policy clear. Presenting measures such as lockdowns as an overreaction to a relatively benign disease, Simón likened Spain's pandemic response to “shooting a fly with a bazooka.”

At the start of the pandemic, Simón stated, “We knew very little, we knew that it was very serious, but we didn't know how serious.... It's true that we had to take drastic action so that our health system did not collapse, but if we had had the information then that we had later, we could have organised a more direct response.”

Speaking on the current so-called “fifth wave” of the virus, he said: “It's very likely that Spain will not have any more major epidemiological waves.... There could be a sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth wave, but they won't be like the others.”

The situation now “has nothing in common with what we were seeing before,” the CCAES director claimed. “There could be another ripple [of the pandemic] in some specific groups, but the situation in Spain, right now, is very favourable, making it possible, bit by bit, to normalize the situation.”

Simón's speech epitomises the Spanish ruling elite's utter disregard for the lives of workers and youth, who will continue to get sick and die in these “sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth waves.” His calls to “normalize the situation” amount to an acknowledgement that the

PSOE-Podemos government aims to let the virus spread unchecked. In this, it is in the company of the bourgeoisie the world over, which is demanding that workers “learn to live with the virus”, that is, to accept mass death from a preventable disease as an inevitable part of life.

Throughout the pandemic, Simón has been one of the most reliable spokespeople for this “herd immunity” policy. Last November, as infections reached their highest numbers since the spring, Simón appeared in a press conference for the Ministry of Health to insist that no lockdown would be implemented, even if it could save thousands of lives.

“What we have right now in Spain is not a [stay-at-home] lock-down, and this will probably not be necessary,” he stated. “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.”

Spain's Constitutional Court is also reportedly planning to declare unconstitutional the second state of alarm in Spain, which lasted from October 2020 until May 9 this year. The state of alarm is the juridical mechanism used to impose health-related restrictions, such as lockdowns.

The Court's announcement comes in the wake of a previous ruling on the COVID-19 lockdown measures imposed from March to June 2020, which were also declared unconstitutional. The legal challenge to both states of alarm was brought by the far-right Vox party. While the second challenge will not be officially voted

on by the 12 Court judges until October, right-wing magistrate Antonio Narváez has drafted a statement declaring that measures imposed to combat the pandemic during this time exceeded the remit of the October-May state of alarm.

The two judgements are the Spanish ruling elite's pledge to allow no let-up in the "herd immunity" policy they are pursuing together with the entire European bourgeoisie. No matter how many new "waves" of the pandemic might engulf Spain—and regardless of how many thousands more needless deaths may occur—the ruling class insists that there will be no return to the lockdown measures forced upon it by a continent-wide wave of wildcat strikes in March and April last year.

In his efforts to downplay the virus and campaign against necessary health restrictions, Simón has aligned himself, like the PSOE-Podemos government for which he speaks, with Vox's reactionary and criminal anti-lockdown policies.

Simón's statements and the two legal rulings come under conditions in which the virus is far from under control in Spain. Many hundreds of people continue to die each week from COVID-19, and tens of thousands are infected. With the reopening of schools at the start of this month, cases will likely shoot up further, as millions of children are herded back into unsafe and overcrowded classrooms, taking the virus home to parents, grandparents and other family members.

Children and adolescents continue to be among the worst affected by the "fifth wave" of the pandemic, with significantly higher rates of infection reported among 12–19-year-olds than among the population as a whole. As of 13 September, the incidence rate per 100,000 people among this age group was 154.45, and 149.56 among under-12s, nearly double the rates reported among 60–69 and 70–79 year olds.

Spanish authorities consider any rate above 150 "high risk," so that by the Spanish ruling elite's own metric, all groups under 19 years of age are in a "high risk" position.

The PSOE-Podemos government allowed the virus to let rip over the summer, leading to spiralling infections and over 4,000 coronavirus deaths. Despite the constantly repeated adage that "children don't get COVID," 315,000 under-19s have been infected with the virus since June 20. Of these, 1,900 were hospitalized, 91 were admitted to Intensive Care Units

(ICUs) and seven died, according to Spain's National Epidemiological Centre.

Millions of children and youth remain unvaccinated, putting them at heightened risk of contracting the virus and getting seriously ill. Only slightly more than half of 12–19-year-olds in Spain have received both required jabs of the vaccine, with some regions having full vaccination rates of only 29 percent among this age group. Those under the age of 12 are not eligible for immunization, and remain completely unprotected from the virus.

The PSOE-Podemos government has proven utterly hostile to a scientifically-guided policy to eliminate the pandemic and save lives. Like the ruling class across Europe, it has placed corporate profits and the wealth of a super-rich elite above all else, seeing tens or even hundreds of thousands of deaths as simply the acceptable cost of doing business.

EU funds have bailed out banks and large companies to the tune of hundreds of billions of euros, while workers have been forced to continue working in unsafe factories, schools and offices and have died in droves from the coronavirus. The same "herd immunity" policies have prevailed across Europe, more or less openly, no matter the nominal political colouration of the party in power.

The whole experience of the pandemic points to the necessity of the working class taking matters into its own hands, breaking with all of the parties of the bourgeoisie—including its pseudo-left props like Podemos. This means building independent safety committees in workplaces and schools to fight the spread of the disease, and developing sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Spain, across Europe and internationally.



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