

Spanish authorities declare COVID-19 will become “endemic”

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Regional governments in Spain have declared that COVID-19 will become “endemic” in the population, in the latest escalation of the Socialist Party (PSOE)–Podemos government’s criminal campaign to abandon public health measures and force Spain’s inhabitants to “live with the virus.”

Epidemiologically, the term “endemic” describes the constant presence and prevalence of a disease within the population of a certain area. It refers to a state where a disease reaches such a level that most of the population has developed immunity. Viruses such as the common cold are considered endemic.

By declaring COVID-19 “endemic,” the Spanish ruling class is signalling its intention to allow the uninhibited spread of infection, and to permit seasonal surges that could strain hospitals to their breaking point. Far from being a response to the inevitable transmission of an undefeatable, if relatively benign, virus, it is a deliberate decision to let a deadly disease rip through the population, no matter the cost in health and lives.

Reporting the epidemiological situation in the northern region of Navarra, the Navarrese Institute of Public and Working Health (ISPLN) claimed the pandemic is practically over, but that the virus would continue to proliferate. “Unless new and unexpected factors emerge,” the report declared, “we could be at the end of the pandemic situation in Navarra. This doesn’t mean that COVID-19 is going to permanently stop circulating, but it will probably be incorporated into the list of infections which spread endemically or in seasonal epidemics.”

“It can’t be ruled out that COVID-19 could cause waves in autumn and winter,” the ISPLN document continued, “but they will probably have a progressively smaller health impact thanks to the high vaccination coverage and the application of other preventative measures by the population. In correctly-vaccinated people, the risk of COVID-19 is not more than that of

other common diseases like flu.”

The claim that COVID-19 will naturally become less deadly and is “like flu” is a lie with no scientific basis. Further mutations made possible by the failure to contain and end the pandemic can produce yet more deadly strains, as the emergence of the much more transmissible and lethal Delta variant of the virus has shown.

Last Friday, the regional premier of the Basque Country, Iñigo Urkullu, also declared that the virus was becoming “endemic” in the region. Urkullu told the Advisory Commission of the LABI (Basque Civil Protection Plan) that “the Basque Country is moving from a pandemic situation to an endemic situation.”

“We can take a new step,” he stated, to allow the region to “move forward with the decree establishing the end of the health emergency” if the trajectory of the virus remains “positive.”

Speaking on the viral situation in the Basque Country, Urkullu stated: “It is a descending, stable and sustainable trajectory. We find ourselves in a different situation [than earlier in the pandemic] and therefore must have different responses.”

On Tuesday, the Basque government then proceeded to end the “Health Emergency” that had been in place in the region, lifting virtually all health-related restrictions other than the obligation to wear masks in crowded public spaces. It is Spain’s sixth region to remove the vast majority of measures, after Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León, Extremadura, Navarra and Madrid.

The announcements by the Navarrese and Basque governments exemplify the “herd immunity” policy pursued by the ruling class across Spain and internationally. It comes only a couple of weeks after 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 on the pandemic, called for the

“normalisation” of the disease.

Speaking to a meeting of the Spanish Society of Epidemiology, Simón falsely presented COVID-19 as a fairly harmless disease and downplayed the risks associated with it, comparing Spain’s pandemic response to “shooting a fly with a bazooka.”

“It’s very likely that Spain will not have any more major epidemiological waves,” Simón claimed. “There could be a sixth, seventh, eighth or ninth wave, but they won’t be like the others.”

The current situation in Spain “has nothing in common with what we were seeing before,” Simón added. “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 normalise the situation.”

These calls to “normalise” COVID-19 or to allow it to become “endemic” come as several hundred people continue to die of the virus every week in Spain, and tens of thousands more are infected. Many thousands of these individuals will suffer from persistent symptoms of the coronavirus for many weeks or even months after infection, with serious potential long-term health consequences including multi-organ damage, cognitive impairment, severe fatigue and muscle pain.

These policies are justified with arguments that large-scale vaccination campaigns have fundamentally changed the pandemic situation—rendering the disease far less dangerous—and that it is impossible to completely eradicate the virus.

Both of these claims are lies. While immunisation is an invaluable tool in the fight against the pandemic, it is not alone sufficient to prevent serious illness, and must be combined with scientifically guided public health measures to suppress transmission.

Furthermore, the example of countries such as China—a society of more than 1.4 billion people—shows that an elimination strategy can be successfully pursued. Despite being the birthplace of the virus, China was rapidly able to bring the outbreak under control with a raft of public health measures, including widespread testing, contact tracing, safe isolation of infected patients, and strict travel restrictions.

These measures have kept deaths from the pandemic in China below 5,000—a tiny fraction of the total fatalities in Spain and in most other “advanced” capitalist countries. After eliminating the virus within its own borders, China has also fought off repeated outbreaks of the Delta variant imported via international travel.

Other countries such as New Zealand, which initially pursued a “Zero Covid” policy and had almost entirely suppressed viral transmission, have recently abandoned this strategy, turning towards the “herd immunity” policy pursued by the vast majority of capitalist governments across the world. New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern announced on Monday that her government would be “transitioning to a new way of doing things,” arguing that the Delta variant is a “game-changer.”

There is nothing inevitable about continuing lethal waves of the pandemic in New Zealand, Spain or any other country. The successes achieved by China and a few other capitalist states show the pandemic can be fought. The potential exists to mobilise social resources to eradicate COVID-19. If measures were implemented in a globally coordinated manner across the world, the pandemic could rapidly be ended.

Spain’s PSOE–Podemos government has proven utterly hostile to a scientifically led 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 over 100,000 deaths as simply the cost of doing business.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) has launched a global campaign for the eradication of the virus, based on the policies advanced by epidemiologists and other scientists. This above all requires the working class breaking from the stranglehold of the trade unions and social democratic and “left populist” parties like the PSOE and Podemos, who have opposed a scientific fight against the pandemic at every turn.

Workers must take matters into their own hands, building independent safety committees in workplaces and schools to fight the spread of the disease, and developing sections of the ICFI in Spain, across Europe and internationally.



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