

Spanish scientists oppose PSOE-Podemos call to treat COVID-19 like the flu

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16 January 2022

Opposition among scientists is mounting to the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government's open embrace of mass COVID-19 infections and deaths, calling to treat COVID-19 as an "endemic disease" like seasonal influenza. COVID-19 cases in Spain are still rising to record levels, and deaths are rapidly increasing.

Last Monday, Spain's Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez was the first European leader to call on the European Union (EU) to debate the possibility of treating COVID-19 as an endemic illness like the flu. He told radio Cadena SER: "The situation is not what we faced a year ago. I think we have to evaluate the evolution of COVID to an endemic illness, from the pandemic we have faced up until now."

Later in the week, Health Minister Carolina Darias proposed to change Spain's COVID-19 monitoring protocols to align them on the system used to monitor the flu. She said: "We have to go from an emergency-style vigilance to one of better quality and which is compatible with other respiratory phenomena." She added: "Spain wants to lead this debate" in the EU and internationally.

The call to make COVID-19 endemic has nothing to do with science. Endemic means the constant presence and prevalence of a disease within a population in a certain area.

Just like in the US where the federal government will no longer require hospitals to report the number of people who die from COVID-19 every day, in the EU, Spain is taking the lead to limit reporting on COVID-19 driven above all by a political effort to cover up mass infection and death. Scientists have raised the alarm.

Lorenzo Armenteros, spokesperson of Spanish Society of General and Family Physicians told *El Confidencial* that this policy aims to "minimize the

situation and bury our head in the sand." He insisted that to treat COVID-19 this way, it would have to be a "stable disease with no possible or very few mutations, with a low degree of infection and a therapeutic alternative to be able to treat certain cases with drugs." The PSOE-Podemos government's policy, he added, is "closer to hiding data that can be known or cause alarm because it has gotten out of control."

Similarly, epidemiologist Vicente Martín of the Spanish Society of Primary Care Physicians (Semergen) said treating COVID like the "flu" is "precipitous." He said, "Do we have to consider 200 daily deaths as normal? What is the number of deaths that must be understood as acceptable?" He criticised "rushing or trivializing Covid by saying that it is like the flu, because it's not."

Martín insisted on being more demanding in controlling the flu, which also causes 15,000 annual deaths. Rather than "flu-ing covid", he appealed to "covidize the flu" and that 99.9 percent of health professionals be vaccinated against this disease, as is done against COVID-19.

Epidemiologist and former WHO official Daniel López Acuña told *RTVE.es*: "we are not going to stop having the problem because we stop counting." He continued, "The mistake is in thinking that the problem no longer exists by not counting infections, or by reducing the number of days of isolation, or by establishing quarantines in schools with five children instead of keeping what we had ... The problem continues being there, and it has to be addressed." He added, "If we stop acting, what we are going to have are more contagions."

Acuña also referred to the PSOE-Podemos government's recent policy to let the virus spread rapidly in the population. In less than two weeks, the

government has announced it may stop recording infection data, reduced quarantine period from 10 to 7 days, decided to quarantine students from classrooms only when five cases are found and scaled back its contact-tracing programme.

Significantly, according to *El País*, the new flu-like monitoring system has been secretly piloted in five regions and nine hospitals. It has been in preparation since Summer of 2020, soon after the PSOE-Podemos lifted the strict lockdown measures it was forced to implement after a wave of wildcat strikes in auto, manufacturing and meatpacking, mainly in Southern Europe and North America, forced governments to impose strict lockdowns in spring 2020. This policy was not implemented, however, apparently based on calculations that was too soon to implement this strategy.

The highly contagious Omicron variant has however exploded the ruling elites' hopes in dealing with COVID-19 via a vaccine-only strategy. Their turn is to a naked policy of immunity via mass infection.

The PSOE and the pseudo-left Podemos party plan to relax health restrictions even as the Omicron variant smashes all records in Spain since the pandemic began in February 2020. One in every 33 people in Spain—3 percent of the population—has tested positive for COVID-19 in the last two weeks. On Wednesday, Spain broke its record for the highest number of COVID infections, with 180,000 new cases. Over the past three weeks, there have been over 1,700 COVID deaths.

Nearly 8 million people (or 17 percent of Spain's population) has been infected. This is an underestimate, however, as medical testing has collapsed, and many people using self-testing kits do not confirm their positive results to the health authorities.

The rapid spread of the virus is leading to mounting pressure on hospitals. Over 17,000 COVID-19 patients are currently receiving treatment, with 2,228 people in intensive care units (ICUs). In 26 provinces, COVID-19 patients are occupying more than 25 percent of intensive care beds.

Amid this health catastrophe and the government aims to cover up the real infection and death rate, the main discussion dominating the news has been a campaign against the impact of factory farms on animal welfare, after remarks by Stalinist Consumer Affairs

Minister Alberto Garzón were published in *The Guardian* in late December. The treatment of pigs and cows has dominated the news, rather the ruling classes' criminal health policy that threatens to kill millions.

The PSOE-Podemos' call to make the virus endemic is the Spanish equivalent of UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's infamous phrase: "No more fucking lockdowns! Let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" It means letting the virus spread widely among the population to prioritise profits over lives, even if it means millions of infections and deaths. This policy has already led to the deaths of over 115,000 people in Spain, and over 1.5 million throughout Europe.

Podemos' decision to support this criminal policy makes it complicit in mass death, echoing Brazil's fascistic president, Jair Bolsonaro, who downplayed the virus as "just a little flu."

It is also an indictment of Podemos' affiliates internationally, like Bernie Sanders in the United States, Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, or Syriza in Greece. It is impossible to fight the pandemic by electing these pseudo-left forces into office. In Germany, the Left Party is imposing the same deadly policies at regional office.

For the working class, there is no electoral strategy to fight COVID-19. Only an elimination strategy can help stem the further loss of life, which requires an international turn to class struggle. Only a conscious mass movement of the Spanish, European and global working class directed against the bourgeoisie and its policies of mass infection can end the pandemic and save lives.



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