Spanish Morenoites attack China's "Zero COVID" strategy

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The pseudo-left Morenoite Revolutionary Workers' Current (CRT) is agitating against China's "Zero COVID" policy, as the pandemic rages out of control in Spain, Europe and internationally. Spain is nearing the grim milestone of 10 million confirmed COVID-19 cases, over a fifth of the population. Yet the CRT is denouncing China for adopting scientific health policies designed to stop the spread of the coronavirus and thus save millions of lives.

In a January 17 article on its online publication Izquierda Diario, titled "Beijing tightens restrictions for cases of Omicron two weeks before the Olympic Games," the CRT denounces China, implying that necessary restrictions are an intolerable encroachment on personal liberties.

In its opening lines directly beneath the title, the CRT summarises its opposition to China's elimination strategy, depicting it as repressive and authoritarian. It states: "The Chinese government has backed a 'zero tolerance' policy that includes police persecution, repression and total closures. However, the Omicron variant seems to be avoiding these measures and infiltrating into the large cities, two weeks before the start of the Winter Olympics."

Taken in contrast with its hostile presentation of China's attempts to combat the pandemic, the CRT's acknowledgment that coronavirus cases are nonetheless being imported into China can only be read as an indication that the Morenoites view the renewed contagion as a good thing. This casual acceptance or even celebration of the reentry of the virus into a territory where it had been all but eliminated is a demonstration of the CRT's indifference to the deaths and long-term health consequences that COVID-19 brings with it.

"China has remained ruthless in their 'zero-tolerance' policy against COVID," the CRT continues later in the article, "with strict restrictions on mobility, repression and persecution, selective or complete lockdowns to contain the outbreaks, and the practical total closure of its borders."

What have been the results of the policy that the CRT denounces? China, by contrast, a mass society of over 1.4 billion people, has recorded only slightly more than 100,000 cases since the beginning of the pandemic, and fewer than 5,000 deaths. In the whole of 2021, only two people died from the virus in this country.

This extraordinary contrast is a testament to the fact that a successful elimination strategy can be 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 the closure of non-essential businesses, widespread testing, contact tracing, safe isolation of infected patients, and strict travel restrictions.

As the example of China and a few other capitalist countries shows, there is nothing inevitable about continuing lethal waves of the pandemic. 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.

It is such a policy, which could have saved countless thousands of lives, that the Morenoites in the CRT oppose. What have been the consequences of the rejection of such policies by the European Union (EU) and the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government in Spain?

After over 1.6 million COVID-19 deaths across Europe, the seven-day moving average fatality count continues to rise in Spain, where over 1,100 people died last week. Excess death figures show that Spain's total COVID-19 fatalities are well over 100,000. More than 4,000 of these came since mid-November, as the Omicron variant began to make its presence felt, giving the lie to the claim that the virus has been rendered harmless due to widespread vaccination. Around half of the total number

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of cases have occurred in this latest wave alone.

Nearly 20,000 people are currently in hospital with COVID-19, a level not seen since February of last year. Around 2,300 people are in Intensive Care Units (ICUs), the highest number since May 2021.

The enormous death toll and incalculable wider effect on health is the direct result of the criminal and murderous policy pursued by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government. They have refused to follow a scientifically-guided policy to eliminate the pandemic, instead prioritising the interests of Spain's banks and big business over the health and lives of its population.

Throughout the pandemic, the Morenoites have consistently agitated against lockdown measures. In January of last year, as the catastrophic "third wave" of the pandemic took hundreds of lives a day, the CRT published a statement denouncing social distancing restrictions as "authoritarian and palliative" measures, declaring, "As if it were a tap, they [the PSOE-Podemos government] are limiting our liberties and movements at their will."

At other key junctures in the pandemic, such as when the PSOE-Podemos government lifted its limited restrictions in April last year, the CRT downplayed the risk of infection. It reacted with silence to the reactionary ruling in August of Spain's Constitutional Court that COVID-19 lockdown measures imposed in spring of 2020 were unconstitutional. At the end of summer, it called for "in-person education" in universities.

As 2021 drew to a close and the Omicron variant began to sweep through the country, causing mass infections, CRT leader Santiago Lupe added his own reactionary piece to the Morenoites' growing body of anti-scientific, anti-lockdown material. Attacking the PSOE-Podemos government from the right, Lupe presented his opposition to measures to control the pandemic as a defence of individual liberties, echoing the positions of the neo-fascist right. He wrote:

> [The PSOE-Podemos government's] answer today is the same as other times. ... New restrictions, measures without proven impact—like outdoor mask mandates—and, significantly, new limitations on fundamental rights such as those represented by the COVID-19 passport or calls for new curfews. … With these restrictions, the state reinforces its coercive, Bonapartist mechanisms, even though many of these measures have no proven effect to limit contagion.

The CRT's opposition to measures to fight COVID-19 is an exposure of its hostility to the working class. Its position is neither a misreading of the danger posed by the pandemic nor an accident. It reflects the material class interests upon which the CRT is based. Speaking for well-off layers of the upper-middle class and union bureaucrats, whose posts and lifestyles depend on the upward movement of stock markets and the exploitation of workers, the CRT aims to keep profits flowing into the coffers of the banks, whatever the cost in lives.

It functions as a tool of Podemos to contain growing opposition among workers and youth to the government's policies and dissipates it into harmless channels. Its reactionary role is a warning that the working class cannot rely on any faction of the union bureaucracy or the political establishment.

By backing the ruling elite's reactionary campaign against China's "Zero COVID" policy, the CRT is not only demonstrating its disregard for the lives and health of workers, but also aligning itself with the anti-China warmongering of the imperialist powers. Ruling elites and media around the world endlessly demonise and malign China, blaming it for the emergence and spread of the pandemic and pressuring it to abandon health restrictions. This is part of a campaign to poison public opinion against the Chinese people and prepare the ground for war.

The working class must make a decisive break from the unions, Podemos and their props in organisations like the CRT, and take matters into their own hands to fight the spread of infection and the drive to war. This requires the building of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and internationally.

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