

Social murder in Spain: 217 dead, 1,900 missing in Valencia flood

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The catastrophic impact and death toll from last Tuesday's Valencia floods are an indictment of the social and political order. Valencia is well known to be one of Europe's most flood-prone areas, and scientists have for years warned Spanish and European authorities of the urgent need to protect its population. Yet masses of people received no warning on Tuesday before walls of water from flash floods broke over their homes and workplaces.

Spanish authorities tried to cover up the scope of the catastrophe and refused to publish a death toll, which was unknown until Friday night when notes of a meeting of the Valencia regional authorities were leaked to the press. They revealed that a staggering 1,900 people were missing and nearly 200 people confirmed dead. Since then, the number of confirmed dead has risen to 217 across Spain, including 213 in the Valencia region.

According to photo data from the Copernicus Emergency Management Service, the European Union (EU) space program, the floods hit at least 77,000 buildings, home to 199,000 people. Mud has buried many of the bodies and floodwaters have carried others out to sea. Streets are littered with cars tossed about like matchboxes by the floodwaters. Thousands of people still do not have access to running water, electricity, heating or medicine, and stores and supermarkets across the region are in ruins.

While Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government has ordered 10,000 soldiers and military police to the region, rescue operations are still largely being carried out by volunteers. The Spanish Health Ministry has warned that hospitals are "on the verge of collapse," and by Friday, its emergency hotline had received 75,000 calls. The Mediterranean Corridor routes, on which 40

percent of Spanish goods pass, are closed. The Madrid-Valencia A3 highway is cut, trains in Valencia are stopped, and dozens of roads and bridges are demolished.

Moreover, the storm is still lashing eastern Spain: Murcia, Almeria, Alicante, Castellon, Tarragona, and now southern Valencia again are all on flood alert.

Valencia is the scene of a social crime. Scientists have long warned that human-induced climate change would raise the vulnerability of the Mediterranean region, and of eastern Spain specifically, to catastrophic floods. After Valencia flooded in 2019, the Red Cross issued a report warning of weak infrastructure, building construction taking place in flood-prone areas, and nonexistent disaster planning in Valencia and called for measures to protect its population from future floods. None of these warnings were heeded in official circles.

The PSOE and Compromís, the Valencian allies of the middle-class pseudo-left Podemos and Sumar parties, set up an unfunded Valencian Emergency Union (UVE) shortly before leaving office. Their successor, Valencian Premier Carlos Mazón of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), scrapped the UVE after being elected in 2023. At the same time, Mazón cut inheritance taxes on landowners and handed €90 million in corporate subsidies to Volkswagen.

As the storm approached, Mazón refused to take action, though Spain's State Meteorological Agency gave warnings five days in advance, correctly predicting flood waters would peak Tuesday. He issued baseless assurances to the public that the rains would diminish over the course of the day. It was not until shortly after 8 p.m. Tuesday that his government issued a text message alert advising residents to stay indoors. But by that time, the region was flooded and hundreds were already dead.

In *The Condition of the Working Class in England* class that is unfit to rule.

Karl Marx's great co-thinker Friedrich Engels gave a famous definition of social murder. "When society places hundreds of proletarians in such a position that they inevitably meet a too early and an unnatural death," he wrote, and "yet permits these conditions to remain, its deed is murder just as surely as the deed of the single individual."

Anger is erupting at the social murderers who run Spanish and European society. Yesterday, Sanchez, Spain's King Felipe VI and Queen Letizia visited Païporta, one of Valencia's worst-hit towns, blocking rescue supplies as police set up a security perimeter around them. Outraged residents surrounded Sanchez and the royal couple, pelting them with mud and chanting: "Get out!", "Pedro Sanchez, where are you?" and "Murderers!"

Billionaire capitalist aristocrats condemned workers to death, demanding they come to work amid the flood. Spain's richest man, Amancio Ortega (net worth €127 billion), bars workers at Inditex from having phones at work, and they missed even the hopelessly late official emergency texts. Workers confronted Mercadona supermarkets owner Juan Ruig (€9 billion) for ordering Mercadona trucks out during the storm surge, to which Ruig replied by shouting obscenities.

With global warming, workers and youth face a world crisis that cannot be solved in the rotten framework of the capitalist nation-state system. It is well known that global warming will cause increasingly violent storms around the planet. However, no coordinated action is taken to stop it, or to invest the necessary resources to set up infrastructure and disaster response plans capable of withstanding such emergencies.

Instead, in one country after another, state officials and the ruling class treat working people with malign neglect, leaving them to fend for themselves amid catastrophic storms. In the United States, Hurricane Helene caused severe flooding recently, resulting in over 230 deaths, while continuous rainfall across Central Europe led to flooding and 20 deaths just weeks before the Valencia disaster. Floods in Nigeria, Chad and Ghana have killed over 1,500 people.

The industrial, technological and scientific resources exist to halt global warming and protect humanity from its effects, but they cannot be mobilized for this purpose while they remain under the grip of a ruling

Where, it must be asked, have the resources gone that could have been used to build flood-resistant infrastructure and save lives in Valencia? Since the 2008 Wall Street crash, the European Central Bank has massively expanded its balance sheet, printing nearly five trillion euros in public money that was handed over in bailouts of the financial and corporate aristocracy. Over the same period, the EU powers collectively spent hundreds of billions of euros on raising their military budgets.

Under PSOE-Podemos and PSOE-Sumar governments, Spain's military budget hit a record €26 billion. At the same time, Podemos and Sumar ministers oversaw the handing out of EU bailout funds to Spanish corporations, while Madrid continued to trade weapons with Israel amid the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Their hostility to the working class is epitomized by Labor Minister Yolanda Díaz of Sumar (formerly Podemos), who infamously ordered workers back to work at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to over 140,000 deaths in Spain and leaving millions with Long Covid. Last week, she cynically called for "responsibility" from corporate management during the flooding, so "no one works while taking risks."

Bitter experience shows, however, that it is pointless to make moral appeals to the conscience of capitalist parasites like Sanchez or Ruig. They and their pseudo-left defenders like Díaz and Podemos are as impervious as the PP right-wingers to the legitimate demands of the masses.

There is no simple solution to the climate crisis and its effects. Preventing new disasters like the Valencia floods requires building a socialist movement in the working class internationally, to halt imperialist war and genocide, take control of the social wealth created by the workers out of the hands of the capitalists, and use it to meet humanity's urgent social needs.



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