

Spanish State: Flooding tragedy strikes Valencian Community

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As the death toll continues to rise and the images and harrowing accounts of the tragedy experienced by tens of thousands of people in the Valencian Community as a result of what is known in meteorology as a “cold drop” or isolated high level depression, continue to shock us, it is becoming increasingly clear that the authorities have not acted with the determination and speed that the announced threat demanded.

[DANA is the acronym for “depresión aislada en niveles altos”, or isolated high-level depression, also known as a “cold drop” in meteorology. NdT.]

While extreme weather events cannot be avoided, climate denial and cuts to public services tend to weaken, if not render impossible, the response to predatory capitalism that puts profits before the lives of people and the planet. The criminal negligence of the regional government and employers, who have favoured ‘business as usual’ over workers’ right to safety at work, contrasts with the empathy and solidarity shown by the popular classes in coming to the aid of those affected by the cold drop.

The outpouring of solidarity and the desire to help those affected show that, in the face of the TINA (“There Is No Alternative”) of Thatcherism and neo-liberalism, with its religion based on individualism and the commodification of life and society, it is possible to challenge not only its rhetoric but also its practice by creating popular power from below and from the left. That’s why 9 November must be a mass mobilization in solidarity with the victims of the cold drop to demand the resignation of the President of the Generalitat Valenciana, Carlos Mazón.



A tragic cold drop, but a beacon of hope

The cold drop hit the Valencian Country with extreme force on this tragic October 2024, already surpassing the floods of the last century in terms of death and destruction, while the number of dead and missing continues to rise and aid to the affected population has still not arrived three days after 'zero hour'. Electricity, running water and mobile phone coverage have still not been restored, and roads are still cut off or inaccessible in many places. The shocking images and accounts of the tragedy suffered by tens of thousands of people have shaken us, and we are seeing a growing wave of empathy and solidarity with those affected.

The information available shows that the authorities did not act with the prudence, determination and speed that the announced threat demanded. Witness the delays in activating the alarm by the Valencian government, the lack of coordination between protection services - which led to delays in the delivery of much-needed help - and the collapse of telephone exchanges, which were overwhelmed by calls due to the astonishment felt by the majority of the population at the sight of the floods. To all this we must add the refusal of the Valencian government to accept the help of fire-fighters from other autonomous communities who were already ready to help.

The government's criminal negligence benefited from the collusion of a business class that put pressure on the government not to raise the red flag in order to continue doing business, hoping that the rains would not fall as they did. This gamble in favour of the market and the compass of profit has led the bosses to favour business as usual to the detriment of workers' right to safety at work. The capitalists have not changed course, and their profits have weighed more heavily than their employees' right to life and safety.

In the face of the cold drop, this abnormal normality meant that employees remained locked up in their workplaces or at the wheel of their vehicles as the flood advanced in rapid and deadly waves, the civil protection alarm having sounded on mobile phones at 8.15pm, after the end of the working day for a large part of the population and two hours after the first overflows, which led to the blocking of the roads by hundreds of cars, which even today hinders access to the most affected populations. The public administration did not behave any better with respect to its agents who were not essential to deal with the cold drop (administration, teachers, health, and civil servants). The red alert that the government ignored meant that pupils went to school as normal, and schools and nurseries were not closed as a precautionary measure.

While extreme weather events cannot be avoided, their devastating effects can be mitigated by predicting and monitoring their development, drawing up emergency plans and actions, and providing sufficient human and material resources. An example that shows that the impact of the cold drop would have been much less if it had not been poorly managed is that of the UV (Universitat de València) which, faced with the warnings issued by the AEMET on 28 October, decided to cancel teaching activities and later, on the 29th, when the alert changed to red, decided to cancel all activities, thus avoiding thousands of movements.

This insensitivity on the part of the business class and the government, which had tragic consequences, contrasts with the empathy and solidarity shown by the popular classes in coming to the aid of those affected by the cold drop, seeking solutions to their precarious situation, offering accommodation so that they could spend at least one night in the home of a supportive stranger and,

sometimes, even risking their own lives to save that of a stranger.

The climate crisis and global warming, according to scientific data, are increasing the frequency and intensity of these extreme weather events, and the Mediterranean region is the most vulnerable. The Mazón government's climate denial is at the root of the serious shortcomings in the response to the cold drop. Inaction and delay are motivated by an ideology that denies the climate crisis.

In the field of public health, we have seen the harmful effects on health of the denial propagated and financed by the tobacco industry. By sowing doubts about the harmful effects of tobacco, since 'lung cancer existed naturally', preventive measures have been delayed, and the industry, by sowing these doubts, has continued to profit from its activity. Climate denial is harmful because it prevents us from acting on the real risks and threats, as well as on the causes behind them.

The departure of the far right Vox party from the Valencian government has not changed the Partido Popular's climate denialist practice one iota. The far right has also left its mark on the 'Law of Concord' and its school policy, which is hostile to the Valencian language and culture. The far right has determined the priorities, and what was agreed at the time with the Partido Popular is still in force, i.e. the trivialization of its discourse and its reactionary vision.

If climate denial is fuelling the regional government's inaction, the neoliberal policy of cutting essential public services is weakening its capacity to respond to the cold drop. The rollback of the welfare state and the outsourcing and privatization of public services - services for everyone - are being complemented by tax cuts for the rich. These negationist and neo-liberal positions would justify the closure of the Valence emergency unit. This is an example of what not to do in these times of climate emergency.

This position, which denies that change is already here and that this decade is vital to meeting the challenge of degrowth with social justice and improved quality of life, calls for firm and energetic action against predatory capitalism that puts profits before people's lives and the health of the planet.

Horta Sud-Valencia, Paiporta, Sedavi, Chiva, Utiel and so many other towns witnessed the arrival of a human tide of solidarity that helped in every way possible, offering shelter, food, companionship, cleaning, affection and respect for the grief that so many families still face.

Life lessons in critical times, and certainly a good lesson for when we return to normal: learning to transform this popular solidarity into a fight for a society of equals where life and care are above the profits of a few, and to implement plans for reconstruction distanced from a model of urban speculation that, since the 1960s of the last century, has spread to flood-prone and at-risk areas.

Let's raise the tide in the face of adversity, to organize this solidarity and this impetus to defend life against the profit and selfishness of a powerful and dangerous minority.

It is important to continue efforts to develop popular power from below and to the left. But once we have come to terms with our grief, with all due respect and solidarity for those affected, the time has come to call to account the government of Carlos Mazón for its criminal negligence in taking the necessary measures to reduce the impact of the cold drop, and for having left so many people in need of help and terrified, and for so many deaths.

That is why we support the call for a demonstration on 9 November in Valencia to demand Mazón's resignation for criminal negligence. Someone who has failed to defend the lives and safety of so many Valencians cannot remain as head of state.

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P.S.

- IVP. Wednesday 6 November 2024:

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article8731>

- Translated by International Viewpoint from Viento Sur:

<https://vientosur.info/la-tragedia-azota-el-pais-valencia-se-llama-dana/>