

Spain: PSOE government immigration policy aimed at tightening borders

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Proposals put forward last month by the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government to provide a legal amnesty to thousands of immigrants have come under vitriolic attack from both inside and outside of Spain.

Under the measures, up to 800,000 undocumented immigrants will be allowed to live and work legally in Spain provided they can prove that they arrived in the country before August 2004, have a job contract and no criminal record. The PSOE have said that the measure will increase tax revenues, help to combat people trafficking and enable more concentrated efforts to be made against illegal immigration.

It is not the first time that an amnesty for immigrant workers has been put forward in Spain. The former right-wing Popular Party (PP) government of Jose Marie Aznar carried out several programmes aimed at legalising undocumented immigrants. None were met with the level of hysteria currently heard from the proponents of "Fortress Europe."

The PP has denounced the measure, as have a number of European governments which claim the PSOE's policy will encourage greater immigration into Europe. Otto Schilly, Germany's Interior Minister complained, "If some countries are regularising illegals, they cannot look just at their own situation because the decision could affect other countries."

However, the claim that the PSOE is "soft" on immigration is without any foundation. Its one-off amnesty in no way marks a shift away from the anti-immigration measures it has promoted since coming to power last year. As the Inter Press Service of Johannesburg commented on February 7, "The process of legalising the status of undocumented immigrants, which began Monday in Spain, will open doors to foreign workers who are already living in the country in

order to close them more tightly against those who try to enter in the future."

The measure has the support of the Catholic Church, the trade unions and the main employers group. The latter welcomed the PSOE proposal and asked its detractors "not to ruin (the process) before it gets off the ground."

The amnesty is to be combined with a more rigorous policy against would-be immigrants and asylum seekers.

The PSOE has recently carried out negotiations with Morocco to introduce tougher measures to stem the flow of migrants to Spain.

In an interview with the Europa press agency, Josep Pique, Spain's foreign minister, said the influx of migrants was "unacceptable" and urged Morocco to "make a firm commitment" to tackle the problem. Spain has recently installed nocturnal vision cameras and thermal detection devices along most of its coast with Africa and has stepped up joint patrols with Moroccan police.

The Interior Ministry has admitted that it chartered over 227 flights to transport 7,920 African immigrants from the Canary Islands, which are Spanish controlled and a major tourist haven, to mainland Spain during the course of the past year.

The airlifts were first introduced five years ago but has increased rapidly since the PSOE came to power. The immigrants are literally dropped into the streets to fend for themselves. Many are left in cities such as Valencia, Madrid and Murcia.

The migrants, mostly from Africa (but also from as far away as South Asia), have entered Spain from Fuerteventura, one of the Canary Islands, which is 56 miles off the African coast. The area has become the European Union's most important point of entry for

African immigrants, after Spanish police succeeded in closing off the Straits of Gibraltar.

According to authorities in Valencia, no medical treatment is on hand for the African migrants, who subsist on food and clothing from already overstretched charities. A report by Valencia town hall stated that the migrants are “left totally without protection in various points of the city. They sleep in parks and beneath bridges, subsist on charity and risk marginalisation, prostitution and labour exploitation.”

The PSOE’s immigration policy has been condemned by the Association of Human Rights in Andulacia which said that 289 prospective immigrants died off the coasts of Spain and Morocco last year, up from 236 the previous year—many the victims of flimsy boats that had capsized. The government had reported 141 such deaths in 2004 but the association said many immigrants are dying before they reach Spain and so are not counted in official figures.

Spain’s Green Island cemetery is the final resting place for many African’s who had hoped to find a better life. Since 1988, 300 bodies have been buried in pale cement graves, mostly unmarked, as the Spanish authorities have been unable to identify many of the corpses.



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