

Spanish Socialist Party toes US line on Syria

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23 September 2013

The Spanish Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE) has shown again its role as loyal servant of US imperialism, following the agreement between Russia and the Obama administration on the elimination of the Syrian government's chemical weapons.

The PSOE's former minister for foreign affairs and current secretary of social policy, Trinidad Jiménez, described the weapons agreement as a "step forward" but "not enough ... because we all have to stop this war". She added that "we need to strengthen the role of the United Nations".

Until Jiménez made her statement, the PSOE had been involved in a warmongering campaign demanding the Popular Party (PP) government toe the White House line and support its preparations to intervene in Syria, despite huge opposition amongst the Spanish population. Such a war has not been called off, but merely postponed. While the Obama administration temporarily retreated in the face of massive popular opposition and threats from Iran and Russia, their negotiations are a means of pursuing the same war aims through other means. The PSOE is coat-tailing this policy.

As late as August 28, PSOE deputy general secretary Elena Valenciano, responsible for international policy, called for an attack against Syria in response to the unsubstantiated claim peddled by Washington that Syria had used poison gas in an attack on Ghouta on August 21.

Valenciano declared, "There are many instruments of international law and not just the United Nations resolutions.... We must punish this action and we have to punish it with the instruments of international law at hand" recalling the "the principle of the responsibility to protect is also a principle of international law".

Nine years ago the PSOE came to power on the backs of mass antiwar opposition to the PP government's

intervention in Iraq and its lies which to blame the Basque separatist Euskadi Ta Azkatasuna (ETA) for the March 11, 2004 terror bombs in Madrid. The PP concealed evidence linking Islamist groups to the atrocity, fearing that the population would blame the attacks on the PP's unpopular decision to go to war in Iraq.

Opinion polls at the time regularly showed that more than 90 percent of the population was opposed to Spain's participation in the Iraq occupation. Millions took part in demonstrations across the country.

The new PSOE government under José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was forced to withdraw Spanish forces from Iraq. Relations with the Bush administration, which claimed that Spanish withdrawal was a victory for terrorism, plunged rapidly.

While it exploited hostility to the Iraq war for its electoral purposes, the PSOE was fundamentally hostile to the broader opposition to war rooted in the working class. It set about rebuilding its relations with the US, tripling Spain's military commitment in Afghanistan and sending troops to Haiti. The Zapatero government also collaborated with CIA rendition flights to Guantanamo Bay by allowing aeroplanes to refuel in Spain.

In the judiciary, the government intervened behind the scenes to prevent prosecutions of US officials and military personnel charged with war crimes, including those involved in the death of Spanish journalist José Couso in Iraq.

The PSOE saw the election of Barack Obama to the White House as a new opportunity to realign itself with US imperialism. In March 2011 the Spanish parliament voted for a PSOE motion for Spanish military intervention in Libya with 336 deputies in favour and just three against.

In November 2011 the PSOE lost power. The PP was able to capitalise on the social disaster brought about by

the 2008 economic collapse and the €15 billion austerity measures imposed by the PSOE.

Two years after its defeat and despite the state of the economy, social impoverishment and corruption scandals shaking the PP government, the PSOE has been incapable of benefiting politically. Its vote has decreased from 30 percent in November 2011 to the current 21 percent.

The PSOE's desperate attempt to whip up support for war is aimed at distracting public attention from the social catastrophe for which it is responsible. Spain now has 21.8 percent of its 10 million population classified as poor. Income levels of Spanish workers have declined to levels below that of 10 years ago, with the annual purchasing power of the average person standing at €18,500.

Over a quarter of under-16-years-olds—some 2.3 million—are now at risk of malnutrition (defined as not eating the 2,100 calories a day recommended by the World Health Organisation), whilst overall unemployment stands at 26 percent and at 56 percent amongst youth.

The unions have directly collaborated with the passing and implementing of International Monetary Fund/European Union dictated reforms and, where they have not, they have demobilised the working class and allowed the government to impose them by decree.

In the last three years, the unions have signed agreements with employers, the PP and the previous PSOE government that have seen pensions cut, and labour reforms that ended collective bargaining, cheapened redundancy payments and made it easier to hire and fire workers.

Last May, the unions attempted a grand social pact with the PP government with the aim of “work[ing] out a common exit strategy” from the “social emergency” Spain finds itself in. The call was made to prop up the discredited PP government and gather all the political and social forces to impose further cuts and prevent any opposition within the working class.

However, according to the Ministry of Employment, in the first five months of the year the number of strikes increased by 34 percent compared to the year before and the number of working days lost doubled. Workers, youth, pensioners and unemployed have also participated in mass protests against cuts in education, health care and the pensions system. In 2012, there

were 36,000 demonstrations, double the amount of the previous year.

Anticipating the social eruption that must follow, the PP government has increased the anti-riot budget from €173,670 in 2012 to more than €10 million in 2016, including new weaponry such as laser rifles, sound cannons, microwave guns, electromagnetic guns and foam launchers.



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