

Spanish government strengthens anti-migrant border fence

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The right wing Popular Party (PP) government of Spain has taken the decision to strengthen the border fence separating its enclave port city of Melilla from the rest of Morocco in North Africa. It will be covered with an anti-climbing mesh and topped with a new concertina razor-wire, designed to rip and grab onto clothing and flesh.

The original border fence was erected around Melilla and Ceuta—the other Spanish enclave in Morocco—in 2005 by the Socialist Party (PSOE) government. It consisted of 11 kilometres (6.8 miles) of parallel three-meter (10 feet) high fences with razor-wire, regular watch posts, CCTV, spotlights, noise and movement sensors, and a road running between them for police patrols. Over the years it has been heightened to six meters and satellites and unmanned drones introduced.

A year after its construction PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero promised to remove the razor-wire after scores of people suffered horrific injuries trying to climb over the fence. It was finally removed in 2007.

The PP government has decided to reinstate the razor-wire, regardless of the consequences. The stated intention is only to install it in vulnerable areas, but the government delegate in Melilla, Abdelmalik El Barkani, has made clear that if the police decide it is necessary, it will be installed along the whole 11 kilometres. El Barkani cynically stated, “I do not like that the concertina is there, I do not like that the fence is there, I do not like to have problems with illegal immigration, but what is clear is that there is a mandate that must be met by the Forces of State Security, and that is that the SSA [Sub-Saharan Africans] must fail to get in.”

Further horrific methods are being prepared. As the fence gets more dangerous to climb, migrant workers are attempting to reach Ceuta and Melilla by swimming

along the coast. In order to prevent this, the Spanish government is planning to build a floating dock and fence that extends 200 meters into the sea with an underwater net to catch anyone attempting to dive under.

The reinstatement of the razor wire is being justified by the government on the basis that the number of people attempting to cross the border has doubled to 3,000 between January and mid-September this year, compared to 1,610 during the same period last year. A Moroccan NGO, the Rif Association of Human Rights, reports that about 40 migrants have been killed over the past two years.

The rise in migrant workers attempting the deadly crossing into Ceuta and Melilla is the result of the terrible conditions being created by the imperialist countries through intensification of predatory wars, repression, ethnic cleansing, civil wars, hunger and poverty. There has been a marked increase in the number of migrants from Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Mali.

More and more people are forced to risk their lives in a struggle to survive. Hundreds have died of thirst in the desert that surrounds the enclaves, drowning in the sea after their overcrowded, rickety boats capsize and being shot at by border guards. Most of those who successfully cross the borders are then apprehended, put in overcrowded detention centres and eventually deported back to their places of origin where they are often detained again and tortured.

Melilla and Ceuta are the European Union’s only land borders with Africa. It relies on the Spanish government to ensure it patrols effectively to prevent people from immigrating to the rest of Europe. For this purpose Spain works in close collaboration with the European Agency for the Management of Operational

Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union (Frontex), which was established in 2004.

Frontex held a conference this October in Warsaw that gathered 200 people and speakers from all over the world. In addition to the EU member nations, speakers came from countries as diverse as Israel, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Georgia and Rwanda. The conference also included a Biometric Examiner from the Police Forensics of Interpol.

The Frontex conference is just one example of how immigration controls and the search for ever-more sophisticated and repressive measures to enforce them have become a global business, as well as a global operation. The main purpose is to divide the working class at a time when the internationalisation of their struggles becomes an essential question. It is used to blame workers from other countries for the crisis of capitalism as it is expressed in each country.

The response by the PSOE and the Stalinist Communist Party-aligned Izquierda Unida (IU) to the PP government restoration of the razor-wire has been to say that what is needed are more patrol agents instead.



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