

Podemos leader promotes patriotism at mass rally in Madrid

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Last Saturday, Podemos organized its first mass rally in Spain's capital Madrid. According to the organisation, 300,000 convened for the "March for Change," with 260 buses bringing thousands of supporters from across Spain.

The aim of the march according to its leader Pablo Iglesias was "not to demand anything of the ruling Popular Party [PP] government," but a show of strength to demonstrate that the "social majority is not willing to trust the PP and the PSOE [main opposition party, the Socialist Party]."

At the end of the march Iglesias gave a pro-capitalist, nationalist speech, in which the defence of "national sovereignty" was the recurrent theme. He evoked Cervantes' Quixote, the Spanish poet Antonio Machado, the uprising against the Napoleonic occupation of Spain in May 1808, and the proclamation of the Spanish Republic in 1931.

He stated, "We came to celebrate that in 2015 the people are going to recover our sovereignty and recover our country. We also came to reach out to others... This is a foundational moment. This is a constituent moment of a new country that has decided to recover its sovereignty, to recover its democracy. The time is now. Yes we can!"

Iglesias' patriotic demagoguery is nothing new. His speeches are full of appeals to nationalism and attacks on the "caste," the term used to designate the PP and the PSOE, for having "sold out the country" to the "troika"—the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Union.

In a recent statement, Iglesias attacked the government's disgraceful decision to not supply the latest expensive drugs with 95 percent cure rate for all Hepatitis C patients by stating that "a patriotic government would sit with the pharmaceutical

companies and say: 'You cannot profit at the expense of people dying of my country'."

Iglesias spelled out the basic policy that a Podemos government would implement. "We want a change that guarantees the pensions of our elders; that strengthens our small businesses; that our investment in I+D+I [research+development+innovation] is equated to the EU level; we want to defend an innovative industry, and technological, food and energy sovereignty; we want changes to open the door to a green economy; to leave behind the unproductive and precarious housing economy; changes to the labour market in order to better compete; a change that puts the accounts in order; and we want to wage a merciless battle against fiscal changes."

Iglesias also demanded a "debt restructuring", without stating how or when.

This speech gives the lie to any claim that Podemos is a threat to the Spanish ruling class. Its economic programme aims at convincing sectors of the ruling class that a Podemos government would not mount a genuine challenge to its interests, but would mobilise the middle and upper-middle class against the working class.

Since its foundation one year ago, Podemos has junked its meagre array of palliative reforms. While in the European May elections the party called for a reduction of the age of retirement to 60, in December's economic programme it called for it to remain at 65. Now it proposes only an ambiguous change that will "guarantee" pensions.

In December they called for a 35-hour workweek. Now, Iglesias speaks like a leader of the main business organisation, the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, when he states that changes are needed in the labour market to "better compete."

The constant attacks on the “caste” and references to the struggle of those “below” against those on “top” were recurring themes in his speech. Iglesias forgot to mention the secret meeting that took place between himself and Podemos’ party strategist, Iñigo Errejón, with former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and former Defence Minister José Bono, at the latter’s house.

The meeting, leaked by Zapatero in a radio interview, was confirmed weeks later by Iglesias who commented, “For me it was a pleasure, I learnt a lot: To speak with people that don’t think like you, but who have had governing experience and talking of politics in general was incredibly interesting.”

Iglesias is talking about a prime minister responsible for imposing the first wave of austerity and sending the army to break the air traffic controllers’ wildcat strike in December 2010; and a former defence minister who increased defence expenditure and the deployment of troops to the US-led NATO occupation of Afghanistan.

Iglesias’ speech referred to the struggles waged by the working class and youth over the years against education reforms. Omitted was the treacherous role played by the unions in demobilising the working class, isolating strikes, letting off steam through one-day general strikes and negotiating labour and pension reforms with the government.

Also included were references to the M-15 Movement, the youth movement that occupied city squares in May 2011. “This Puerta del Sol has witnessed the recovery of our freedoms,” he stated, “and on that 15th of May, thousands of young people cried ‘They don’t represent us! We want democracy!’ Those brave people are here today, you are the force of change, thank you for being here.”

The M-15 Movement, known as the *indignados* (angry ones), was dominated by pseudo-left tendencies. They opposed it having any clear programme, perspective, and political leadership, and left the ruling class free rein to impose one round of austerity after another. Nearly four years after May 2011, these same tendencies such as Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-capitalist Left), En Lucha (In Struggle), Democracia Real Ya (Real Democracy Now) and Juventud Sin Futuro (Youth Without Future) are fully integrated with Podemos or the Stalinist led Izquierda Unida (IU-United Left). The prospective future general

coordinator of IU, Alberto Garzón, was once one of the main spokespersons of the protest movement before being co-opted into top position within IU in the space of six months.

However, last Saturday, as one observer put it, “Although there were some young people present, the vast majority of the crowd was over 30 and many marchers were in their 60s and 70s. The people marching today in Madrid are not the young 15-M protesters of 2011.”

Iglesias also glorified the new Syriza government in Greece, describing it as a “wind of change”. He spoke of the latest measures announced by the Greek government, claiming, “Today in Greece there is a serious and responsible government that works for the people. Who said that we could not do it? Who said that a government can’t change things? In Greece [the government] has done more in six days than other governments in years.”

Contrary to Iglesias’ claim, it took only hours to expose the bourgeois character of Syriza with its alliance with the Independent Greeks (ANEL), a right-wing xenophobic split-off from the conservative New Democracy (ND) and giving the control of the Ministry of Defence to its leader, Panos Kammenos. Syriza also abandoned its previous pledge to dissolve the fascist-ridden riot police units, and at the international level supported European imperialism’s sanctions against Russia.

Even then, Iglesias was quick to stress the differences in the Greek and Spanish context in order to placate and reassure the ruling elite of Podemos’ readiness to impose austerity measures. Following Alexis Tsipras’ victory in Greece, Iñigo Errejón told *El País*, “We are keeping a distance because the situation in Greece and Spain is different. [...] Spain is stronger, and has a greater capacity to respond.”



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