After the Brussels attack, Podemos defends “war on terror”

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31 March 2016

The pseudo-left party Podemos is using the March 22 attacks in Brussels that claimed the lives of 35 people and left 340 injured as a means to join the rest of the political establishment in stoking up a right-wing atmosphere using the “war on terror.”

For a decade and a half, pretext of fighting terrorism has served a critical political function for the imperialist countries. Attacks, often like in the recent Brussels’ attack involving suspects who are closely monitored by the state, are exploited to attack democratic rights and boost the powers of the intelligence agencies and police. The state then uses the attacks as propaganda to justify neo-colonial wars for resources, spheres of influence and cheap labour.

Podemos’ integration in this rhetoric is not some sort of concession to right-wing forces or a pre-emptive move designed to avoid criticism as some critics have said. Rather, it represents another aggressive move by Podemos to stake its claim with the Spanish bourgeoisie to be a viable ruling party.

Last week, the right-wing Popular Party (PP), the Citizens party, and the social democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) called a meeting of the Anti-Jihadist Pact. The pact was signed by the PP and the PSOE after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris last January, which the new Citizens party subsequently joined. It was followed by a deepening of the assault on democratic rights, including strengthening the penal code and state of emergency legislation, and more surveillance measures on social networks, telephone calls and emails.

Podemos officially refused to join but sent Rafael Mayoral, the head of Relations with Social Movements, with observer status to the commission set up by the pact. This was followed by a ratcheting up of law-and-order rhetoric by Podemos.

After the Paris attacks last November, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias once again stated that strengthening the penal code was not “efficient,” adding that “renouncing the protections of criminal law” and reducing freedoms and civil rights “is falling into what the terrorists want.”

However, Iglesias made clear he had no principled objection to the ruling parties using Islamist attacks to strengthen the state apparatus and use them as pretext for imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East. Quite the opposite.

Iglesias stated that Podemos welcomed some “positive” aspects in the pact in regards to the strengthening of the intelligence services and greater coordination amongst the police.

Last week, following the Brussels attacks, Mayoral was again sent to the Anti-Jihadist Pact meeting. Iglesias also created a “monitoring unit” with Mayoral, Pablo Bustinduy (head of International Relations) and former Chief of the Defence Staff of the Spanish Armed Forces and Podemos’ shadow Defence Minister, Julio Rodríguez.

Iglesias also said that Podemos and the “monitoring unit” would continue in the pact with observer status and would continue proposing new measures to face the “terrorist threat.” Morover, Iglesias made himself available to the Spanish government “for whatever” and said it was necessary to call for “unity” of all political forces and support the State Security Forces and emergency units.

Among the measures so far proposed by Iglesias are to increase the budget for the National Intelligence Centre (CNI) and police forces, and more coordination amongst European intelligence services. This is shared by the PP, PSOE and Citizens. The Popular Party government in fact increased this year’s budget for the

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CNI by 7.7 percent last August. As part of his negotiations on forming a government with the PSOE, Iglesias has already proposed to make himself vice president in charge of the CNI.

Iglesias' proposal for increased coordination of European intelligence agencies echoes the false arguments advanced in the media internationally that the Brussels attacks took place because of insufficient coordination between spy agencies. In fact, there was extensive coordination, and Belgian intelligence had been warned by Turkish, Russian, and Israeli forces of the identity and targets of the attackers. However, Belgian intelligence officials did not arrest them and allowed them to proceed unhindered to their targets.

Iglesias has remained completely silent on the ties of European states with the Islamist networks, which have developed enormously during the last five years in the Libyan and Syrian wars, presumably because this would undermine his defence of the intelligence services.

This is a complicit silence, coming months after Iglesias denounced the links between ISIS and the European Union, US, Turkey and Saudi Arabia after the November 13 attacks in Paris. Since then, Podemos has junked its previous criticisms of the reactionary Saudi regime, with the party's local affiliates from the state-owned shipbuilding towns of Cádiz and Ferrol urging the Spanish government to speed up the sale of warships to Saudi Arabia.

Podemos is making it clear that they will do anything to support Spain's intelligence and military activities, whilst aiding the Spanish bourgeoisie by blocking growing hostility among broad layers of the population against attacks on democratic rights and militarism.

Podemos' "anti-terrorist" rhetoric is part of its presentation as a state force capable of ruling alongside the pro-imperialist and pro-austerity forces like the PSOE, with which they are continuing to negotiate after the deadlocked December 20 election and the failure of the Socialist party and the right-wing Citizens party to form a government.

It is also a direct appeal to the CNI, which has raised doubts in the press that Podemos would not be a reliable member in the parliament's Commission of State Secrets as they might leak state secrets.

Ironically, the Chief of Spanish Defence Staff, Julio Rodríguez, did not remain so quiet as his party colleague, Iglesias.

In an interview with radio station Onda Cero, Rodríguez stated that he thought the Islamic State has borne "fruit of the violence Europe has sown," and referred to a 2013 report which said, "Western countries, Turkey and Arab countries financed [ISIS], they were aware that they were going to create a caliphate there, to oppose Bashar al Assad, and the report says literally that they were aware they were going to create that caliphate."

Rodríguez is not ignorant of how Western powers have used Islamist fighters in their proxy wars for regime change. Under Rodriguez's leadership, the Spanish army participated in US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan (2001), Iraq (2003), and played a major role in the 2011 NATO war on Libya. On that occasion, the US and its European allies, including Spain, funnelled arms and weaponry to Islamist militias fighting Gaddafi's regime, which they also targeted with a mass bombing campaign.

Podemos' decision to embrace the "war on terror," NATO, US-led wars, the intelligence agencies and attacks on democratic rights is another warning as to its utterly reactionary role.

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