

What is behind Podemos' international "anti-fascist conference" in Spain?

Alejandro López
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Amidst protests internationally against the anti-immigrant, "America First" policies of the new Trump administration, and vows to defend Spain against "the ravages of other countries," the Spanish pseudo-left Podemos party is calling for an international anti-fascist conference.

Behind the appeal is the attempt to block the emergence of an independent movement of the working class and youth and channel anti-Trump sentiment behind pro-European Union (EU) factions of the Spanish bourgeoisie.

Like its European counterparts, the Spanish bourgeoisie is split over how to react to the Trump regime. His election marks the definitive end of the post-war role of the US as the anchor of European integration and guarantor, through NATO, of Europe's imperialist interests. Trump has declared the EU a German-led economic rival to the US and predicted that other countries would follow the UK's lead and leave.

Such sentiments are expressed by the National Front's Marine Le Pen, currently forecast to win the first round of the French presidential elections in April and in the Netherlands, Geert Wilders' Freedom Party is polling first with 31 percent for the March national election.

Podemos, however, offers no alternative to the rise of right-wing, nationalist sentiment. In fact, Podemos facilitates it.

The two leading factions contesting for power within Podemos at this weekend's party congress—the majority faction led by general secretary Pablo Iglesias and the Errejonistas wing led by Podemos spokesperson in parliament and Secretary for Policy and Strategy and Campaigning, Íñigo Errejón—both support the calling of an "anti-fascist conference." So has Podemos' Anticapitalistas faction led by Miguel Urbán and Teresa Rodríguez.

The conference is called "against austerity, the rise of the far right and in defence of a democratic revolution in Europe." It aims to counter the "rise of racism and authoritarianism," Islamophobia, and "racist" and "unsupportive" EU institutions. Similarly, Trump is attacked for "reinforcing racism." In response, Podemos calls for a two-pronged solution—firstly, to prevent people being

attracted to right-wing populism and secondly, to form a "new historic bloc" that serves as a "retaining wall" against the rise of far-right nationalism.

Podemos' posturing as an opponent of far-right nationalism is a political fraud. If the far right has been able to rise, it is precisely because pseudo-left forces like Podemos have sought alliances with social democratic parties (or, as in the case of Syriza in Greece formed governments directly) committed to austerity. This has enabled far-right forces to exploit social discontent and present themselves as an opposition to the establishment.

Podemos has itself legitimated the deepening integration of far-right forces into mainstream European bourgeois politics, by hailing nationalism as progressive and seeking to recruit large sections of the Spanish officer corps into its ranks. Its "new historic bloc" is a term designed to cover up the development of deeper ties with other bourgeois parties using the pretext of a struggle against the far right.

This was recently made clear in the December issue of the magazine *La Marea* dedicated to "Left Antidotes to Neofascism" and containing interviews with a dozen prominent pseudo-left leaders.

Pablo Iglesias, asked about Podemos' promotion of patriotism, defended it "absolutely." He explained that "the misfortune of losing a Civil War" meant "certain signifiers"—a reference to words such as "Spain or homeland"—remained "in the hands of our political adversary." Asked whether an international strategy could confront the far-right, Iglesias responded negatively, declaring that, "it crashes with the political scenario of the nation-state"—the foundation of Podemos' reactionary politics.

Alberto Garzón, leader of the Stalinist-led United Left which has a parliamentary alliance with Podemos, when asked about Trump's protectionism, openly declared that "the economic proposals of Trump and other far-right parties does not differ much from us."

Just as blunt was Íñigo Errejón, a proponent of "left populism." Asked if there is a possibility that Podemos

could adopt certain “anti-establishment” positions of the far right, Errejón replied that the neo-fascists and Podemos occupy the same political “space.”

He said, “the difference between a democratic and open populism and reactionary populism is who is the enemy. The question is who provides a sense or who constructs that national community. It is true that the Popular Party has occupied the space of Francoism, but I think the other space, the possibility of a nation constructing itself against the weak, that of fascist populism, I think we occupy that space.”

Errejón simply added that Podemos’ “popular and patriotic direction” avoided this space being occupied by the far right.

Another interviewee was none other than Ada Colau, mayor of Barcelona and leader of Barcelona en Comú, a political ally of Podemos, who is notorious for ordering the city’s police force to target street vendors and her opposition to a strike by subway workers. By imposing a legally mandated “minimum service,” she ensured its defeat.

Podemos does not intend to mount any serious struggle against the far right, in Spain or elsewhere. Rather, it aims to block social opposition by containing, misdirecting and ultimately dispersing any movement of the working class—in the interests of its upper-middle-class constituency.

Podemos’ value to the ruling elite is expressed in the media support it has received for its “back to the streets” campaign, coordinated with the union bureaucracy, which consists of a few staged media stunts during strikes. The media talk up these actions as oppositional in order to railroad escalating social anger behind Podemos’ bankrupt, nationalist perspective.

The “anti-fascist” conference is the latest manifestation of these politics. It was first proposed by the Pabloite Anticapitalistas and its leader Miguel Urbán, according to pro-Podemos web site *Cuarto Poder*. “The intention of Urbán,” it said, “is to be able to count upon with relevant politicians in Madrid such as Britain’s Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders in the US, alongside representatives of the European left, who are facing the advance of the far right.”

No sooner had the ink dried on proposals for Urbán’s conference, however, than the two main “relevant politicians” showed their true face.

Bernie Sanders declared, “If President Trump is serious about a new policy to help American workers, then I would be delighted to work with him.” He then approved the appointment of General James “Mad Dog” Mattis as Trump’s secretary of defence. The same man led the bloody assault on Fallujah in 2004, which reduced the city to rubble and resulted in the deaths of untold thousands of civilians.

As for Jeremy Corbyn, he recently dropped his opposition

to immigration controls, declaring that “Labour is not wedded to freedom of movement for EU citizens as a point of principle” in Brexit talks. This was but the latest step in his capitulation to Labour’s right wing, which has seen Blairite warmongers appointed to his first shadow cabinet, a free vote in support of bombing raids on Syria, the renewal of the Trident nuclear weapons programme, and his abandonment of his lifelong opposition—based on a programme of economic nationalism—to the EU.

The Pabloite idea of an anti-fascist conference then disappeared, only to be resuscitated nearly a month later, just as rising divisions erupted within the Spanish ruling class over how best to preserve and advance its national interests. Spain’s main dilemma is whether to side with Germany and France in defence of the EU, or with the US in the hope of becoming Washington’s new strategic partner in Europe.

Podemos has intervened, for now at least, to defend the pro-EU faction. In parliament, Iglesias and Errejón joined the chorus of voices, spearheaded by the daily *El País*, criticizing Mariano Rajoy’s Popular Party government for its attempt to continue relations with the US as before. They both condemned Rajoy as “shameful” for being one of the few European leaders not to have criticized Trump.

Iglesias said, “Mr. Donald Trump is clearly a representative of an unprecedented democratic setback and a brazen attack on human rights,” adding “I think our Government should at least say so.” Errejón said Rajoy should join the “clamour” of civil society and many world leaders against Trump’s policies, of which “I feel proud.”

Whatever mild criticism they raise against Trump, what they despise of Trump and the sections within the US ruling class he represents is the fact that the US is repudiating its previous role as the overseer of the EU and NATO—institutions that Podemos defends. At the same time, Trump’s nationalism and economic protectionism are exposing the right-wing implications of their promotion by Podemos.

A real threat facing the working class is that Podemos is creating fertile ground for the creation of a genuine far-right party, one that can more directly use the language of “homeland,” “Spain,” and nationalism to defend the interests of the ruling class.



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