Pseudo-left cover for dockworkers' defeat in Spain

Alejandro López and Paul Mitchell
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The State Coordination of Sea Workers union (CETM) has carried out a despicable betrayal of thousands of Spanish dockworkers.

Last week, the union called off strike action and immediately agreed to negotiations with the National Association of Stevedoring and Ship Consignment Companies (ANESCO) over a six percent wage cut and huge job losses in the form of early retirement schemes, which will affect a quarter of the workforce. On March 29, it was announced that the wage cut had increased to 10 percent.

The director of ANESCO said, "the agreement was very positive for the sector." CETM leader Antolín Goya declared, "We have flexibilised the work groups and helped the competitiveness of the ports, but even if we negotiate a lot, the government is not moving."

The Popular Party (PP) government is "not moving" because the CETM capitulation means that it can proceed with its plan to abolish the dock labour scheme (Sociedad Anónima de Gestión de Estibadores Portuarios, SAGEPS). The scheme was a concession to the dockworkers following the end of the Francisco Franco dictatorship in 1975 and afforded them a degree of job security and relatively better wages. Its abolition would decimate jobs and bring in low-paid agency workers on as little as 60 percent of existing wages.

The ending of dock labour schemes in European Union (EU) countries has been a major objective of the ruling elite in its drive to liberalise the transport and shipping sector across the continent to compete with international rivals. In July 2016, the European Court of Justice fined Spain €15.6 million [US$16.7 million] and ordered it to pay €134,000 per day until it complied.

On March 16, the PP government attempted to steamroller legislation though Spain's Congress in order to eliminate SAGEPS, but it was voted down by the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Unidos Podemos (comprising the pseudo-left Podemos and Stalinist United Left, IU). They voted against the legislation on the grounds it was a unilateral action by the PP and did not allow the unions enough time to present their own proposals. Their overarching concern was to prevent a far broader struggle erupting in the working class, which would threaten the "social peace" overseen by the unions and possibly bring down the weak minority PP government.

A key role in covering up this treachery was played by the pseudo-left groups, which intervened to prevent any independent mobilization of the dockworkers. They are promoting the lie that the dockworkers have achieved a great victory and that this is evidence the PSOE and Podemos can be pressured to defend the working class. Like the PSOE and Podemos, their main concern is that the unions, of which their members form much of the leadership, will lose their authority under conditions in which the ruling class relies on the unions to police workers.

A particularly pernicious role has been played by Clase contra Clase (CCC), the Spanish section of the Morenoite Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International (FT-CI). Unlike the Spanish sections of the Committee for a Workers International and the International Socialist Tendency, CCC has not joined Podemos—claiming it is constructing "a new anti-capitalist and class-based space as an alternative to the neo-reformists of Podemos and the United Left".

But this is only in order to distance itself from Podemos' continual betrayals, while in the end the Morenoites always offer "critical support" to the party led by Pablo Iglesias.

In a piece published in *Izquierda Diario* immediately after the Congress vote, "Dockworkers: the Yes we can of the working class," CCC leader Santiago Lupe asks, "What can the victory of the dockworkers show us? The class struggle as a way to twist the arm of the government, the EU [European Union] and the struggle for the capitalists to pay for the crisis."

Lupe points out that the PSOE has been committed to austerity and responsible for deindustrialisation since the 1980s and 1990s—"If anyone knows anything about destroying strategic sectors of the labor movement, that is the Socialist Party". Moreover, in the municipal councils controlled by Podemos "the debt is paid religiously, demands such as remunicipalisation [reversing the privatisation of local services] are abandoned and they use their minority or the legal framework in place to justify that no effective measures can be taken." In Congress and the regional parliaments, Lupe adds, Podemos does not propose "a single measure…to fight for concrete measures against major social problems."

All of which counts for nothing. For Lupe, the "sole threat of

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a strike" has proved to be enough to force the PSOE and Unidos-Podemos to become defenders of the working class. "One of the most concentrated, unionized and coordinated sectors of the labour movement has shown 'muscle' and this time it has been enough to prevent several parties of the Regime from voting with 'state responsibility' that has characterized them at other times," he proclaims.

Lupe claims that the dockworkers have been able to "use the internal crisis" within the PSOE in order to "twist their arm and force them to vote 'no'". The next step is to for the "the trade union bureaucracy and the *new reformism*" to realise that "if they want their statements to have some credibility among the unemployed, the precarious and the rest of workers, they must call assemblies in the workplaces in which to organize a real plan of struggle to impose a workers' solution to the crisis." [Emphasis added]

By new reformism, CCC means above all Podemos. All of this verbiage is churned out in an attempt to deceive the working class into believing the unions, the PSOE and Podemos can be pressured into defending their interests.

The truth is the CETM never wanted a strike, fearing it would upset its collective bargaining agreements with the employers that provide lucrative jobs for its officials. From the start, the CETM sought to isolate the dockworkers and prevent them blocking Spain's maritime trade by proposing strikes on alternate days in each port. It refused to link their struggle with others in Spain and stopped it from becoming a global battle against the privatisation of ports and the destruction of dockworkers' jobs and living standards internationally. The CETM called off strike action three times.

After capitulating, CETM leader, Antolín Goya, stressed that this "was not a victory for anyone" and that the unions would now do what they always wanted to—negotiate with "absolute normality that includes, as it should do, the Government."

What they intend is to negotiate away the SAGEPS scheme as other unions have done across Europe, which International Dockworkers' Council (IDC) General Coordinator Jordi Aragunde ordered when he declared they had to "come to an agreement on the best conditions for restructuring the Spanish port model and for complying with the ruling of the European Court of Justice."

Lupe's claim that the "internal crisis" in the PSOE opened up an opportunity to "twist their arm" flies in the face on what actually happened last September, when events again proved that the PSOE was wholly a political instrument of the Spanish bourgeoisie.

A small group of bankers, CEOs, intelligence agents, PP officials, and PSOE operatives worked with the PSOE bureaucracy to engineer a coup to oust General Secretary Pedro Sánchez.

Sanchez had entered into negotiations with Podemos over the formation of a government, under conditions where there were grave doubts of the ability of the PP to form a stable coalition. But the ruling class had determined that its favoured course of action was the return to power of the PP to continue to impose savage austerity. The right-wing cabal was led by the former Prime Minister and PSOE General Secretary Felipe González, one of the leading figures in Spain's Transition to parliamentary rule in 1978, after the death of fascist dictator Franco, and the PSOE's Andalusian leader Susana Díaz. It was promoted through the pages of the pro-PSOE daily *El País*.

Sánchez caved in, announced his resignation and declared his loyalty to the González-Díaz faction. Two weeks later, the PSOE voted to abstain in a parliamentary vote in order to allow the PP to form a minority government.

The PSOE coup also exposed the bankruptcy of Unidos Podemos, whose origins lie in the Stalinist and student radical forces, which hoped to emerge as the main beneficiary of the devastating collapse of the two-party system that had ruled Spain since the Transition. Last year, for nearly 12 months, Spain could not form a government as neither the PSOE or PP had a majority despite two elections. This above all reflected deep popular opposition to the pro-business policies the PSOE had pursued after it took power in 1982, exacerbated by the European Union austerity drive after the 2008 Wall Street crash, and Spain's participation in NATO wars.

Podemos' orientation to this very same PSOE and constant pleas for it to form a "progressive government of change" underscored the fact that they had no real differences with the austerity policies of the EU and the European social democrats. Workers also experienced, first hand, how Podemos-backed local "governments of change" in Spain's major cities were also imposing anti-working class, pro-austerity policies.

As a result, the Podemos leadership's strategy of allying with IU, hoping to overtake the PSOE in elections and emerge as the senior partner in an anti-PP coalition, failed dismally. In the June 26 election, the Podemos-IU alliance lost nearly 1 million votes compared to the 2015 election and failed to overtake the PSOE, setting the stage for bitter factional infighting inside Podemos.

These are the bankrupt and discredited organisations, dedicated to the maintenance of Spanish capitalism, that the CCC is asking Spanish workers and youth to place in charge of their fate.

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