

The “anti-fascism” of Podemos: A cover for Spain’s anti-worker Socialist Party government

Alejandro López
9 July 2018

The new minority Socialist Party (PSOE) government, backed by the pseudo-left Podemos party, has announced a battery of symbolic “historical memory” measures targeting the 1939-1977 Spanish fascist regime of General Francisco Franco.

Franco’s remains are to be removed from a state mausoleum in the Valley of the Fallen, which would become a memorial to Franco’s victims in the 1936-1939 Civil War. The Interior Ministry, led by conservative former judge Fernando Grande-Marlaska, has also ordered a review of police merit awards given to Antonio González Pacheco, a notorious Francoite torturer known as “Billy the Kid,” now aged 71. Pacheco’s four medals increase his pension by 50 percent.

The posturing of PSOE and Podemos as “anti-fascist” is a political fraud. The new government is taking over the austerity and militarist policies of the previous right-wing government of the Popular Party (PP), a political descendent of the Franco regime. And last week, the entire European Union, including the PSOE government, adopted anti-refugee policies demanded by far-right governments in Italy and Austria to keep refugees out by detaining them in a vast network of prison camps.

These fascistic policies give the lie to PSOE-Podemos anti-Franco posturing. After leaving the PP’s labor reforms and 2018 austerity budget unchanged on taking office, the PSOE is now discussing more cuts for the 2019 budget. Initial estimates are that the PSOE could impose around €7 billion in social cuts. The PSOE is continuing plans to double Spanish military spending made by the PP and has endorsed the EU’s European Intervention Initiative plans for a joint overseas army.

The new government is escalating attacks on democratic rights. Not only is it continuing to jail Catalan political prisoners after last year’s independence referendum, but it is maintaining the PP’s law on public security, known as the “gag law.” This limits freedom of speech, prohibits mass gatherings and imposes fines for protesting and making comments on social media. It has led to the imposition of 48,000 fines against social media users accused of insufficient respect for state security forces.

Podemos’ promotion of the new PSOE government as an anti-Franco force is a cynical attempt to cover up the threat of authoritarian rule posed by the EU and the PSOE in the 21st century with lies about fascism in the 20th.

Podemos Secretary of Organisation Pablo Echenique said, “We believe that the government is going in the right direction, but we have a lot to do in regard to historical memory because very little has been done in the past years.”

He demanded that the PSOE “take away ‘Billy the Kid’s’ medals, take him to court and judge him.” The PSOE “should also guarantee that the victims of Francoism have access to the justice system and act against the systematic mistreatment of those who struggled for democracy and suffered in our country.”

If fascist torturers are living out their retirement with fat pensions, this is above all due to the reactionary role of PSOE and the Stalinist and Pabloite forerunners of Podemos.

In the face of mass revolutionary struggles of the Spanish working class in the 1970s, they defended the capitalist regime and set up a blanket amnesty for fascist crimes. After the 1978 Transition to parliamentary rule, this amnesty was enforced by the 1982-1996 free-market PSOE government of Prime Minister Felipe González, who oversaw the promotion of many Francoite judges, police and civil servants to top posts.

At every step, the “anti-fascist” pretensions of the PSOE and Podemos clash with the deep, historic links between their capitalist politics and the old Franco regime. Podemos has issued a non-binding resolution in parliament calling on the government to “promote all appropriate actions ... for the investigation and prosecution of crimes ... during the Franco dictatorship” and for the removal of “distinctions, awards and medals” granted to Franco’s police torturers.

The resolution calls on the PSOE to “modify” the 1977 Amnesty Law proposed by the PSOE and the Stalinist Spanish Communist Party (PCE) and adopted by the Francoite regime. Podemos is making vague calls to change the law so the Spanish courts are not prevented from “investigating, prosecuting and imposing penalties for the persons responsible for committing crime of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.”

At the same time, however, leaders from various Podemos factions are insisting that there should be no serious punishment of Francoite criminals. After submitting the resolution, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias said, “Our country has a pending task with the victims of Franco and this [resolution] is simply to offer them justice.” He emphasized that justice for the victims of fascism “has nothing to do with revenge or opening old wounds,” but with “adapting our country to Europe.”

Miguel Urbán—who represents Podemos in the European Parliament and is a member of the party’s Pabloite faction linked to France’s New Anti-capitalist Party—agreed, saying that it “is not only a question of gestures and memory, it is a question of constructing democracy and justice.”

A PSOE government backed by Podemos will prove to be a bitter enemy of the working class, whatever symbolic “anti-Franco” measures it adopts. Behind its bland insistence that the struggle against fascism is democratic, rather than a socialist struggle for power led by the working class, lie decades of counterrevolutionary Stalinist and Pabloite attacks against Trotskyism. Coming as the EU and the PSOE set up their vast network of concentration camps, this is an urgent warning to the workers about pseudo-left parties like Podemos.

They will not oppose, but rather fall in line with the EU austerity, wars and far-right attacks on democratic rights. They are indissolubly linked to neo-fascistic tendencies by their historic ties with the European ruling elite and state apparatus. This points to the urgent necessity of building a party, a Spanish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), that can mobilize the vast opposition to capitalism that exists among workers and give it a socialist and revolutionary perspective.

Iglesias, a former Stalinist youth leader, wants to criticise Francoism, but refuses to “open old wounds.” He uses a catchword used by the PP to oppose discussing the crimes of fascism, precisely because any serious discussion today exposes the “anti-fascist” pretensions of the Stalinist and Pabloite tendencies as fraudulent.

Their close ties to the Francoite regime emerged over decades of counterrevolutionary Stalinist and Pabloite politics in the period after World War II. Having played the key role in suppressing revolutionary struggles by the working class in the anti-fascist resistance movements fighting in Greece, Italy and France, the Kremlin and its Spanish allies supported post-war European capitalism. This included, in Spain, the Franco regime.

In 1956, the PCE published a statement announcing that it was willing to “work with all political forces” working for “national reconciliation.” On this basis, it appealed for support inside the Catholic Church and Franco’s police forces and army for “peaceful change” in Spain. In 1974, this policy was renamed the “Pact for Liberty,” allowing the PCE to forge new alliances not only with the PSOE, but also with the royalist Carlist Party and with the Catholic sect Opus Dei.

This exposed the bankruptcy of the Pabloite forces who had split from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953, based on the perspective that the Stalinists would ultimately be “forced to project a revolutionary orientation.”

The petty-bourgeois forces in the Pabloite movement, as they split with the ICFI, were renouncing Marxism and revolutionary politics. Instead, they guarded the Stalinists’ left flank as the PCE, the PSOE and the Francoites came together in a political alliance against the danger of proletarian revolution in Spain.

For the PCE and the Pabloites, the fall of the Francoite regime in 1978 was to be sealed with reconciliation with the fascists, not the overthrow of capitalism and the fascist ruling class. On this basis, the Stalinists sought an alliance with the PSOE, which Podemos is continuing to this day.

The PSOE was re-founded in the 1970s under Felipe González as a capitalist party explicitly hostile to Marxism, working on a perspective of collaboration with the Franco regime. With the aid of the US State Department and French and German social-democrats, González’s “renovators” ousted the old leadership in the PSOE’s Suresnes Congress in 1974. As strikes reached record levels in Spain and across Europe, the PSOE set out to work with the PCE to block a seizure of power by the workers.

In January 1977, before the first democratic elections, González met with Prime Minister Adolfo Suárez, former general secretary of the Francoist National Movement. According to Basque nationalist leader Julio Jáuregui, who attended the meeting, they demanded that the government “grant an amnesty for all acts and crimes of political intent that occurred between July 18, 1936 and December 15, 1976.”

The PSOE’s amnesty for fascism, they insisted, had to be institutionalized. A “great solemn act was needed to forgive and forget all the crimes and atrocities committed by the two sides of the civil war, before it, in it and after it, to this day,” says Jáuregi.

A few days before this meeting, González had explained to German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt the need for the government to grant a “total amnesty as a means of reconciliation.”

At the same time, the PCE was emerging as a fervent advocate of an amnesty for fascism and of the Amnesty Law in particular. Marcelino Camacho, leader of the PCE-dominated CC.OO. union and a PCE deputy, said: “We want to open the door to peace and freedom. We want to end one chapter and start a new one. We Communists who have been so badly wounded, and who have suffered so much, have nevertheless buried our dead and our resentments. We are determined to step firmly forward on this road to freedom, on this path of peace and progress.”

Weeks before the Amnesty Law was passed, Santiago Carrillo, the decades-long leader of the PCE, said at a rally that the PCE wanted to “make a cross over the civil war once and for all” to “definitely overcome the division of Spaniards into victors and losers of the civil war.”

To this day, the Podemos leadership hails Carrillo, the murderer of revolutionaries during the Spanish Civil War, who defended the infamous Moscow Trials through which Stalin liquidated the Old Bolsheviks and who helped organize Stalin’s assassination of Leon Trotsky.

As Iglesias wrote in Carrillo’s 2012 obituary in *Público*, “Santiago could have many shortcomings and it is certain that he was responsible for ignoble decisions against other communists, but he was never mediocre. In my life I have had the opportunity to talk with prominent political figures that I cannot mention here, but none of them made me feel the honor and the historical privilege I felt when I met Santiago. Nobody exercised so highly the dignity of being general secretary. In spite of everything, Santiago was one of ours. Now and forever.”

Iglesias’ support for Carrillo, like his support for a right-wing PSOE government continuing the policies of the PP, is a marker of the party’s intended future role.

An unprecedented crisis of European and Spanish capitalism is rapidly vaporizing the distinction between the ex-Francoites, the social democrats and their pseudo-left allies. Podemos is a petty-bourgeois party. It will prove deeply and violently hostile to the genuine movements of opposition that are being prepared inside the working class.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact