Spain’s Podemos party acquiesces to legal persecution of its member Isabel Serra

Alejandro López
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Isabel Serra Sánchez, a member of the Podemos Parliamentary Group in the Assembly of Madrid, has been sentenced to 18 months in prison, a fine of €2,000 and barred from public office. Her supposed crime was to have joined a group of 50 protesters opposed to the eviction in January 2014 of a person with a permanent disability from a home in the working-class neighbourhood of Lavapies in Madrid.

Serra’s defence provided testimonies from several witnesses, hundreds of photographs and 115 videos proving that she came to the protest only briefly and was at some distance from the demonstration. The sentence, however, states that whether Serra played a “significant role” is not “decisive.” Instead, her participation in “the group is enough to establish her responsibility for the criminal actions committed by those who made up the group of people who attacked and threw blunt and dangerous objects at the Municipal Police officers.”

The defence team announced that they will appeal the sentence. If the sentence is confirmed, Serra will be barred from presenting herself in elections.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) opposes the persecution of Serra. It has unbridgeable political differences with Podemos, which is sitting in government in Spain carrying out policies of austerity, imperialist war and police repression and now needlessly ordering millions of workers back to work, exposing them to death in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the sentence against Serra, six years after the events took place, is an attempt by the Spanish bourgeoisie to intimidate social opposition and install a police-state climate.

The sentence also exposes Podemos, moreover. The party leadership has acquiesced to the verdict and done everything it can to signal that it will organise no opposition to the emerging police state in Spain—over which it rules, in fact, in coalition with the Spanish Socialist party (PSOE).

Podemos leader and Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias said, “Sentences must be accepted (and in this case appealed) but a huge sense of injustice invades me. In Spain, many people feel that very powerful corrupt go unpunished thanks to their privileges and contacts, while those who protested a shameful eviction are sentenced.”

Podemos Organisation Secretary Pablo Echenique said the courts “have condemned @isaserra without evidence for protesting peacefully to try to stop an eviction of a person with a disability. Obviously, we will appeal, but I thought the judges were there to deliver justice.”

This is all mealy-mouthed claptrap to justify the alignment of Podemos on the police state. Firstly, no one is under any political obligation to accept a reactionary sentence. Secondly, if the powerful and corrupt go unpunished in Spain because of their privileges and contacts, this is an exposure of Podemos, which together with the PSOE rules Spain.

Indeed, last July, Iglesias pledged “full loyalty” to the PSOE on all state questions, including foreign policy and state repression in Catalonia. Months later, when a dozen Catalan secessionist leaders were fraudulently found guilty of sedition, Iglesias said: “Everyone must abide by the law and accept the verdict.” This happened as the streets of major cities across Catalonia filled with tens of thousands of demonstrators, and clashes erupted between protesters and police in Barcelona.

In November, Podemos decided not to oppose the caretaker PSOE government’s Internet censorship law, the “Digital Security Law” known as the “digital gag law,” which allows the state to shut down digital

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communications, Internet infrastructure and apps at will, without a court order. The law's main purpose is to silence domestic political opposition and prevent mass demonstrations and strikes.

Soon after Podemos entered into the PSOE government, it confronted a strike wave in the Basque country and the Basque-speaking region of Navarre, when tens of thousands joined a one-day general strike against austerity. Podemos issued thinly veiled criticisms of the strike for disrupting national unity, in words of one of its leaders in the region: "The strike does not give confidence to a newly installed government." Later, mass protests erupted in rural areas of Spain against social and economic problems facing the agriculture sector.

Since then, the close links between Podemos and the police state have come into the open. In late February, Iglesias joined the Intelligence Affairs Commission, the body that directs, supervises and controls the activities of the National Intelligence Centre (CNI). Iglesias was therefore joining the main body working to monitor and repress social opposition in the working class.

The COVID-19 pandemic has vastly intensified class tensions worldwide. The misnamed "progressive" PSOE-Podemos government has been at the forefront of the unpopular back-to-work policy, enforced by the trade unions, of sending millions of workers back to work even as the virus keeps killing hundreds each day, and is nowhere near controlled. Their aim is to preserve and expand stock market values and the profit margins of major corporations at the expense of workers' health and lives.

This policy is widely opposed by the majority of the population. According to a poll by *El País*, 59 percent of the population support the view that "Confinement must be kept to the maximum, even if this means greater economic deterioration and more unemployment."

The back-to-work policy is now being enforced with gradual lifting of confinement measures, though the government is fully aware that such measures will lead to new outbreaks of the virus. On Sunday, the Health Ministry announced a new pandemic strategy to lower the number of cases to a level "acceptable" by the health system that avoids its collapse. For this, it ordered regional governments to be prepared to double ICU beds.

The PSOE-Podemos government is already warning that it will meet any resistance to its policies with brutal force. In the Basque country, Spanish police assaulted steelworkers trying to protest their unsafe work environment, while last week the police dispersed a protest by Glovo riders in Madrid protesting low wages, precarious working conditions and the lack of protective equipment against the virus.

The criminal policy is being implemented via continued police-state measures, including mass Internet surveillance. The chief of the General Staff of the Civil Guard, General José Manuel Santiago, admitted this in a slip-of-the-tongue comment that that police are a working actively to "minimise this climate contrary to crisis management by the Government" by monitoring social media. Soon after, the State Prosecutor General's Office threatened those who spread "hoaxes" online with up to five years in prison.

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