COVID-19: Podemos, social-democrats prepare to send Spanish police against workers' protests

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The misnamed "progressive" Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is preparing for mass repression as it takes Spain out of lock-down, imposing the unpopular back-to-work policy amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This was revealed in a confidential 22-page document, "Delta Papa Order 21/20: Civil Guard Action in the Framework of the Transition Plan towards a New Normality," signed by Lieutenant General Fernando Santafé and leaked to *El Periódico* last Tuesday. Santafé is the Chief of Operations Command of the Civil Guard, Spain's paramilitary police.

The document was drafted to reorganize security measures during the gradual lifting of confinement measures. Podemos and the PSOE are fully aware that these policies will provoke new outbreaks of COVID-19, needlessly putting millions at risk to keep extracting profits from the working class. The document warns of a "high probability" of growing social unrest in coming months, warning of "acts of sabotage against critical infrastructure or buildings with ties to political parties."

The target of the repression is the working class. The document states that social unrest would come from the "most economically deprived" areas and the millions of "people affected by an ERTE [temporary layoff] or fired" and "production or services sectors that might consider themselves harmed by the ongoing restrictions and limitations." It admits that "economic restrictions caused by the state of alarm have seriously affected the Spanish economy, which may result in an economic crisis affecting the most disadvantaged citizens, who could see their basic needs unmet."

The economic situation is devastating. Lines at food pantries have been growing since the pandemic began. Unemployment rose by 7.9 percent in April, reaching 3.8 million workers. The true picture, however, is hidden by union-backed ERTEs, which let employers stop paying wages to temporarily unemployed workers, who instead receive state unemployment benefits amounting to a 30 percent wage cut. The de-facto state bailout of companies currently affects 3.5 million workers. Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, will likely lose their jobs when ERTEs phase out at the end of June.

Merging as usual the Spanish bourgeoisie's traditional fears of working class opposition and of regional separatism, the document also refers to "politically-motivated or separatist acts aimed at disturbing the peace," referring to Catalan and Basque separatists.

Terrified of mass working class opposition, the PSOE-Podemos government is feverishly making preparations. The document states the Civil Guard will increase "monitoring of social media for preventive identification of possible initiatives or movements that generate or may generate conflict or social alarm," all in the name of struggling against "episodes of disinformation [fake news]." That is, the PSOE-Podemos government is carrying out mass online censorship.

This confirms the statement at a news conference in April, initially dismissed as a slip of the tongue, by Civil Guard General José Manuel Santiago, calling "to prevent social stress created by hoaxes, and to minimize the [online] environment opposing the government's handling of the crisis."

This monitoring aims to provide the PSOE-Podemos government real-time data on the "general acceptance of the restrictive measures of each phase" of de-confinement and to "identify possible areas, localities or social groups that are more likely to violate those rules."

The document is a warning to the working class and youth. As in the 1930s, the capitalist ruling class in each country is feverishly building up its military and police-

state apparatus amid a pandemic, while stoking extreme nationalism in preparation for mass repression internally and war abroad. Fascistic movements, still lacking a genuine mass base, rely on the sponsorship of sections of the existing parties and promotion by the mass media.

The Civil Guard, which overwhelmingly supported the fascist coup, led in 1936 by Francisco Franco that triggered the Spanish Civil War, has been the Spanish bourgeoisie's main forces for repression of the working class throughout the 20th century. The fact that the "left populist" Podemos party is prepared to send it against the working class underscores the deep class gulf separating this party of the affluent middle class from the workers.

Internationally, "left populist" parties are all prepared to play a similar reactionary role. Mélenchon is offering his services to the French ruling class to "guarantee social cohesion" and stifle workers' opposition, while accepting mass deaths caused by the end of the lock-down. In Germany, the Left Party has entered into an alliance with Germany's right-wing Grand Coalition government against the workers, voting unanimously in favour of the German government's multi-billion-euro bailout of the banks and big business. They are terrified of the growing radicalization of workers and youth.

This underscores the cynicism and hypocrisy of the anti-Marxist "populist" professors and activists of Podemos, like its general secretary, Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias.

For decades the ruling class built them up as "left," as they denied the class struggle and opposed working class politics based on calls for "populism." However, this denial was itself a defence of their class privileges and position. Now in power, they clearly recognize the existence of the class struggle, and are desperate to crush it as a threat to their rule.

Since the state of alarm, the PSOE-Podemos government have sent the Spanish police to suppress steelworkers' strikes and protests by delivery riders from Glovo and UberEats. Just a few weeks ago Spain's Constitutional Court outlawed May Day protests, arguing that public health must prevail over the right to protest. With unsurpassed cynicism, this ruling fell as the government was prematurely lifting confinement measures, placing millions in danger of getting COVID-19.

The highly-publicised right-wing protests of a few hundred in Madrid's affluent Salamanca district have not faced the same repression. They have protested every day since Monday, without police authorization as required by law and in violation of the state of alarm. Police not only refused to disperse or fine them, but stood aside, allowing them to continue. Meanwhile, the working class neighbourhood of Vallecas in the same city has seen four times more fines for violating confinement rules than the average in Madrid.

The pandemic is exposing the entire political establishment. All have reached the same policy, defending the interests of finance capital at the expense of workers' lives. The right-wing Popular Party leader Pablo Casado stated that "in the event of new outbreaks, we cannot go back to exceptional measures, we must live with the virus." Similarly, a big business association in Valladolid bemoaned the decision to have a gradual de-confinement to save the elderly who are, they said, a "non-productive group from the economic point of view."

The Podemos-backed mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, said: "We want de-confinement as soon as possible, but we want to do it well, we do not want to wait long."

Five years ago, analysing the support of Podemos for the austerity policy of its Greek ally, the Syriza government, the WSWS warned: "Looking out at the population from the Moncloa Palace through multiple lines of riot police, a Prime Minister Iglesias would be as terrified of the workers as Tsipras or Spain's current prime minister, Manuel Rajoy." It defined Podemos "as guardians of order. The conclusion they drew from the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe ... is that capitalism is the only game in town. They are politically and ideologically conditioned to serve as bribed tools of finance capital."

This warning has been comprehensively vindicated.