

The lifestyles of the pseudo-left

Podemos minister Irene Montero poses for *Vanity Fair*

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The October issue of fashion magazine *Vanity Fair*'s Spanish edition features on its front cover Equality Minister Irene Montero, the partner of Podemos leader and Deputy Prime Minister Pablo Iglesias. Montero also gave the magazine an extensive interview and posed for a photo shoot, modelling luxury clothing on the rooftops of wealthy areas of Madrid. She joined other politicians who have appeared in *Vanity Fair*—German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Michelle and Barack Obama, and none other than US President Donald Trump and his wife Melania.

Speaking to the *Vanity Fair* readership, an affluent constituency with which she is at ease, Montero offered a window into the lifestyle of Europe's middle class "left populist" parties: Podemos, Germany's Left Party, the Unsubmissive France Party, and the Socialist Workers Party in the UK.

Montero was full of gushing praise for the monarchy, bankers and the army, paeans to wealth, and assurances of her "conservative" feminist values. She spoke not a word about protests and rising rates of COVID-19 infection and death in crowded working-class districts of the city, only a few kilometres from where she stood, due to her government's herd immunity policies. While Podemos has given countless private assurances of political reliability to media, banking and intelligence officials, it was trying to speak directly to broader layers of the wealthy and the affluent.

We are bought, Montero was effectively telling the ruling elite, and no matter what happens, we will always instinctively line up on your side. For workers and youth facing a devastating pandemic and mounting police repression and austerity, it is a warning on the boundless corruption of "left populist" parties like Podemos and their hostility to Marxism and the working class.

The interview began, appropriately enough, with Montero entreating *Vanity Fair* reporters to show due respect for the official photo of the king and queen on her office wall. "Careful not to knock it down on top of us!" she exclaimed. Illustrated by a photo of Montero seated in front of this portrait of the royal family and of Spanish and European Union flags, the laughably named Minister of Equality (between genders, that is) details her friendliness with Queen Letizia, based supposedly on their shared concern for victims of human trafficking.

Montero said, "I happened to meet the queen at an APRAMP [Association for the Prevention, Reintegration and Care of

Prostituted Women] event ... and we listened to their [the victims'] life stories together. If we get past the fact that I'm a republican, she seemed like an intelligent and wry woman; she came to the meeting well prepared, and we spoke about topics that interest us both."

In the interview, Montero goes on to praise banker Ana Patricia Botín (net worth: \$800 million), the executive chairman of the Santander banking group. Last October, in a well-publicised interview with TV programme "la Sexta Noche" (The Sixth Night), Montero had criticised "the President of the Government [PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez for] wanting to listen more to Ana Patricia Botín than to Spanish citizens at the ballot box."

Montero, now a minister under Sánchez in the PSOE-Podemos coalition government, made clear that was for show. Asked by *Vanity Fair* about her conversation with Botín at a business conference organised by Sánchez in August, where Montero deliberately sought out Botín for a discussion, the Podemos minister did not conceal her admiration for the banker.

"We belong to different worlds, [but] she seemed to me like an intelligent and pleasant-mannered woman, who clearly expressed dissent," Montero said. "We spoke about feminism, about housing, and I saw that she was interested in hearing my point of view, in the same way that I listened to hers. I felt comfortable expressing large disagreements to her, and that is not always easy."

Indeed, Montero can pleasantly package whatever limited differences she has with more personally conservative layers of the ruling elite. In response to *Vanity Fair*'s questions about her personal relationships, Montero stated: "I've tried different things, of course ... in adolescence, in my youth. But I have always felt heterosexual." However, Montero said she is "modest," adding reassuringly: "In terms of the relationships of a couple, I am conservative."

Asked whether it is fair to call her "radical," Montero wisely responded: "Radical is someone who gets to the root. In this respect, I identify as someone who tries to solve problems from the root."

Social inequality and the obscene fortunes of the ruling class are not a problem Montero sets out to solve, however, but a feature of contemporary life in which she luxuriates. In a February interview with *El Diario*, she had explained: "Feminism is not only about

representation, but also about the redistribution of wealth ... You only have to look at the international leaders we have and they are multimillionaire men.”

The aim of Montero’s petty-bourgeois lifestyle politics is to ensure a greater share of wealth is allocated to the top 10 percent of women, ethnic minorities and other groups. It is virtually self-evident that her desire to see more multimillionaire *women* in positions of power has nothing in common, however, with Marxism and a struggle for genuine social equality, which require the mobilization of the working class to overthrow capitalism and class society.

While Montero was being photographed on the rooftop terraces of the most expensive districts of Madrid, thousands of youth and workers protesting ineffective health policies in the pandemic were being brutally assaulted by riot police sent by the PSOE-Podemos coalition government.

Not a single word of the interview was expended on the over 1 million lives lost, the tens of millions unemployed or pushed into poverty amid the pandemic. Nor was anything said on the one in five (21.5 percent) Spaniards at risk of poverty or the 1.15 million households in Spain who now have not a single member in employment.

Instead, the *Vanity Fair* interview turned to the luxurious mountain villa Montero and Iglesias share in the village of Galapagar, having bought it in 2018 for €600,000.

When they were establishing themselves, after Spain’s *indignados* youth protests and the outbreak of revolution in Egypt in 2011, Montero and Iglesias stressed that they lived in the working-class Madrid neighbourhood of Vallecas, where protests are now erupting. Montero, a former psychology student and member of the Stalinist Communist Youth Union of Spain, ran Iglesias’ cabinet. Blending Stalinism and identity politics, they used empty populist phrases, feminist slogans, and appeals to Spanish nationalism to market themselves politically.

Iglesias even pontificated about the danger of “isolating oneself from what happens around you, like politicians who live in villas.”

Today, asked by *Vanity Fair* if it was a “mistake” to move to Galapagar, 40 kilometres outside Madrid, Montero claimed it was a security measure against the far right: “We took this step to protect our family. And what has happened in the last two years has demonstrated that we were right.” Asked whether she now felt “protected,” Montero unblushingly replied: “I trust the security forces and bodies of the state.”

While this is a fitting motto for a wealthy, conservative woman whose partner sits on the Intelligence Affairs Commission, it nonetheless reveals enormous political complacency. Spain’s military, police and intelligence services are bastions of the far right, closely tied to the fascistic Vox party—the very forces Montero claims they will protect her from. A few months ago, videos emerged of an ex-soldier using images of Iglesias, Montero and other PSOE-Podemos ministers for target practice.

It is, however, more or less obvious what Montero was trying to communicate through *Vanity Fair* to the rest of the ruling elite. We will line up with you against the working class, she was saying, so we are confident you will never have to mobilize the far right against us, only against the workers.

A deafening silence has predominated on Montero’s interview in Spain’s liberal press, or on pseudo-left web sites in the periphery of Podemos like *Izquierda Diario*. It was left to Esteban Hernández of the right-wing *El Confidencial* to express his concern that the leaders of Podemos “have become a caricatured version of widespread vices.” Worrying about the void to the left of Podemos, Hernández wrote that “Spain’s political (and also economic, intellectual) elites are out of touch, this is much more worrying than a few self-promoting photographs.”

In fact, Montero’s interview is a warning of the futility of attempts to oppose herd immunity policies, imperialist war, social austerity and police repression by electing a new, “left” capitalist government. The parties supposedly tasked with running such a government in Spain, Podemos and the PSOE, are already in power, and they are pursuing reactionary policies. The turn for the working class is to an international, revolutionary struggle for socialism against capitalism, the financial aristocracy and its petty-bourgeois “left populist” defenders.

Five years ago, analysing the support of Podemos for the austerity policy of its Greek ally, Syriza, the WSWWS 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 analysis has been wholly vindicated.



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