Spain’s “left populist” Podemos separates migrant children from their parents

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Spain’s Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is implementing the barbaric policy of separating migrant mothers from their children.

Earlier this week, Cadena Ser radio and Eldiario.es reported that a dozen children in the Canary Islands had been separated from their mothers or relatives for months while DNA testing was carried out to verify they were related. The decision was made by the prosecutor of Las Palmas.

Yaiza Martín, a worker at Misión Cristiana Moderna, an evangelical church in Fuerteventura that has acted as an improvised reception centre of migrants to the Canary Islands, explained to the news agency EFE that she has heard cries and pleas from mothers for over two months. The mothers were separated from their children, some two and three years old.

Martín explained: “When they arrive at the port, the children are sent to juvenile centres, and the adults are sent to a warehouse on the dock (where they do the PCR and filiation tests); then to another ship to pass the COVID-19 quarantine and then to the shelter, but the children are not returned until the DNA tests are completed, which usually takes between three and four months.” For the mothers, she added, “this as a terrible thing, because they don’t know who to turn to.”

The PSOE-Podemos government-appointed State Attorney General’s Office has defended Las Palmas Prosecutor’s Office instructions to separate the minors, claiming that it aims to stop human trafficking. According to the attorney general’s statement, since 2019 they have found “alarming number of cases” of minors disappearing together with those who claimed to be their mothers.

These disappearances occurred before receiving the results of the DNA tests. In an inhumane and bizarre argument, the state attorney general asserts that this is proof, not of the brutality of the detention centres where migrants are locked up, but that there was no biological link between them. The statement claims the criterion is of “temporary nature,” although it recognizes that the notification of test results suffers “long delays.”

This policy, however, has nothing to do with stopping human trafficking. The tests, which recall the medical measures employed by fascist regimes against Jews and other “undesirables,” aim to terrorize migrants to stop them from undertaking the dangerous journey to Spain via boat. According to the Interior Ministry, more than 8,000 migrants have reached the Canary Islands from Africa by sea so far this year, compared with just 1,000 in the same period of 2019.

Data shows that there are very few cases in which tests reveal that the adult does not have the relationship that they claim to have with the minor. According to provisional data from 2019, provided by the General Immigration and Borders Commission to the Ombudsman, 416 minors were located who, accompanied by adults, tried to reach Spain irregularly by boat. That year, 651 DNA tests were carried out to prove the parentage link, of which 39 were negative and 38 were pending.

Even the negative test results must, however, be interpreted carefully. As many NGOs have pointed out, bonds between migrant adults and children aren’t always biological.

DNA tests on minors began in 2013 after a recommendation from the Ombudsman warning of risks such as trafficking, illegal adoptions or even trafficking of organs. It should be noted that if such risks exist, this is due to the brutality of the European Union’s anti-migrant policy. Based on police repression, it consigns refugees to a vast network of concentration camps spreading from Turkey, the Greek

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Islands, Northern Africa and Spain's African enclaves in Ceuta and Melilla, and the Canary Islands.

However, even the recommendation of the ombudsman did not include separating children from parents. Instead, it called for authorities to closely monitor the adult's bond with the minor while they waited together in these detention centres.

It was the PSOE-Podemos government which adopted this brutal policy, notoriously implemented by America's fascistic president, Donald Trump.

In 2018, the US government started separating parents from minors, and it currently holds thousands of children behind bars. The assault on migrants in the United States enjoys bipartisan support. Indeed, during last Thursday's presidential debate, Trump asked Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden, "who put the kids in cages, Joe?" This was a reference to the record deportation of 2.7 million immigrants and the hundreds of thousands of parents torn from their children under the Obama administration.

While in the US it has been the Democratic Party that has laid the basis for Trump's anti-migrant policy, in Spain it has been traditionally the social democratic PSOE, supported by the Stalinists and Left Populists, which have led the way in implementing brutal anti-migrant policies.

In the 1990s, in the aftermath of the Stalinist regime's dissolution of the Soviet Union, the PSOE launched drastic attacks on migrants. These measures included fortified frontiers, increasing police repression, militarised borders and razor-wire fences. Spain was the first attempt to externalize border control—in Spain's case, to Morocco. This was later expanded to Turkey and Libya.

This policy has continued to this day. The PSOE-Podemos government has lobbied the EU to continue to fund Morocco to the tune of billions of euros in exchange for terrorising migrants in the country before they try to enter Europe through Spain's North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla and by boat across the Mediterranean. This has led to the deaths of thousands at sea, while in Spain migrants have been attacked and even died due to police brutality.

The PSOE-Podemos government also continued the notorious summary expulsions, or "hot returns," by directly deporting individuals who do manage to cross without conducting any credible trial, trampling on the right to asylum. Earlier this year, the government also sent 111 police officers to support Greece's conservative New Democracy government in its savage crackdown on migrants.

Spanish police are well versed in these practices. In 2014, Civil Guards tried to repel migrants trying to cross the border at Ceuta, by swimming around the Tarajal seawall, by shooting the swimming migrants with rubber bullets and tear gas. Fifteen died. The PSOE-Podemos-nominated state attorney defended the Civil Guards, stating that they were facing a "violent avalanche."

The ruthlessness with which the social democrats and Left Populists are violating elementary fundamental rights and the lives of refugees and migrants must be taken as a warning. They are demonstrating the same ruthlessness towards human life in the coronavirus pandemic, where they deliberately accept the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people by reopening schools and forcing workers back to nonessential activities.

Faced with the deepest crisis of capitalism since the 1930s, the ruling class everywhere is turning to violent police-state measures. The immigration policies of the "left populists"—whether Greece's Syriza and its concentration camps for migrants in the Greek islands, or Podemos-backed separation of children and parents—could have easily been written by fascistic parties like Vox.

The working class must unconditionally defend all refugees and migrants and their fundamental right to asylum, and to live and work wherever they want, as an essential element of the defence of the social and democratic rights of the entire working class.

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