

Deaths mount as Spain's PSOE–Podemos government escalates assault on migrants

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At least nine migrant workers died last week attempting to reach the Canary Islands, a Spanish territory off the west coast of Morocco. The deaths occurred as a boat carrying 30–40 mostly Moroccan migrants sank after hitting rocks close to the northern shore of the island of Lanzarote.

While nine bodies of young men in their twenties and thirties have so far been found, many of the 28 survivors who had been aboard the raft indicated that five women and three children had also travelled with them, who have not yet been located.

According to the International Organisation for Migrants (IOM), which is affiliated with the United Nations, over 500 people have so far died this year on the West Africa migration route to the Canary Islands, with the majority of deaths occurring in October and November. The death toll is already well over double that of 2019, when the IOM recorded 210 fatalities on this sea crossing. These figures are a minimum estimate, the IOM stressed, with the actual loss of life feared to be much higher.

The latest deaths come as the Spanish government steps up its attacks on refugees seeking to make the journey to Europe, announcing late November that they would build prison camps across the island chain to hold migrants pending deportation. The Socialist Party (PSOE)–Podemos government has refused to allow the thousands of desperate people trapped on the archipelago to be transferred to the Spanish mainland, stating that to do so would be a “pull factor.”

Speaking at a press conference on the island of Tenerife at the end of November, Transport Minister José Luis Ábalos reaffirmed that migrants will not be transferred to the Spanish mainland, cynically declaring that the internment camps at military bases across the islands are intended to provide “the most dignified

[humanitarian conditions] possible” until refugees can be deported to their countries of origin.

If migrants are transferred to the mainland, Ábalos claimed, “we will not stop being the entry door to Europe. We cannot send a message that these things are possible. ...”

Spain has appealed to the European Union (EU) to intervene in the crisis in the Canary Islands, with Foreign Minister Arancha González Laya calling for the signing of a “European migration deal.”

“Migration needs a European approach,” Laya declared. “It is not enough that Spain, Italia, Malta and Greece are doing our good work.” In other words, the Spanish Foreign Ministry is demanding that the EU more equally share out the burden of incarcerating, deporting or allowing desperate refugees to drown on the ocean crossings.

In late November, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez despatched Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska and Foreign Minister Laya to West Africa to negotiate agreements with regional governments to prevent refugees from travelling to the Canary Islands, and for the rapid deportation of those who do arrive on the archipelago.

Spain has already arrived at an agreement with Senegal, with Foreign Minister Laya and her Senegalese counterpart Aïssata Tall Sall announcing the conclusion of a deal on November 22 that will see the deportation of all of the Senegalese migrants who are in Spain “illegally” back to their country of origin.

Spain will also reinforce its security presence in Senegal, increasing the number of Civil Guard and National Police members in the West African country, supposedly to combat people-trafficking operations, as part of a joint offensive with Senegalese authorities. The agreement will allow Spain and Senegal to “jointly

fight against irregular immigration, clandestine [immigration],” Laya stated, “which is in the hands of criminal networks.” Laya emphasised Spain’s plans for mass deportations, declaring: “Those who use illegal routes will have to return to their country. ...”

Interior Minister Marlaska also travelled to Morocco in the hope of securing a similar deal, reportedly demanding that the North African country reinforce its Atlantic coast and work with Spain to implement the forced repatriation of Moroccan migrants.

According to *elDiario.es*, authorities in the Canary Islands have been handing out summary expulsion orders to migrants within days of them arriving at the port of Arguineguín in Gran Canaria, in flagrant violation of their right to claim asylum. The migrants, who had had no access to lawyers, despite having the right to legal aid within 72 hours of their arrival, had received deportation notices signed by the Government Subdelegation in Las Palmas, the regional capital of the island of Gran Canaria.

According to Judith Sunderland, acting deputy director for Europe and Central Asia for the charity Human Rights Watch, who visited Arguineguín at the start of November, none of the migrants she interviewed had spoken to any lawyers or had the expulsion orders explained to them in a language they could understand before being made to sign it.

Speaking to *Canarias Ahora*, Sunderland stated: “All of them told me that they had not understood that the document they had been given was an expulsion order. Those who had understood something told me that the Police had explained that the paper meant they had been registered, and it could be used to identify them if they were stopped by the Police.”

These brutal policies are being carried out with the full collaboration of the “left populist” Podemos party, who, despite token criticisms of the treatment of refugees and claims to support the transfer of migrants to the mainland, have refused to oppose these measures.

Speaking last Thursday before the joint committee for the Coordination and Monitoring of Spanish Strategy, Podemos leader and Spanish Vice President Pablo Iglesias declared that while he supposedly disagreed with the PSOE’s refusal to transfer migrants to the Spanish mainland, his party had to “accept” that their minority status in the government would not allow them to act.

“I am not going to continue along these lines because I think that I am being clear,” Iglesias stated. “In politics, unfortunately, what most counts is not being right or having good ideas, but having sufficient forces.”

There is overwhelming popular hostility to the persecution of migrants and refugees. It is precisely these “forces” that Iglesias seeks to contain and suppress. Podemos’s refusal to wage any serious struggle in defence of migrants has handed political initiative to the far-right, who are calling for an even more brutal crackdown on migrants.

Last week, the national spokesperson for the far-right Vox party, Jorge Buxadé, launched into a fascistic tirade against refugees at a press conference, declaring that Spain was in the grips of a “veritable migrant invasion” and calling on the Armed Forces to intervene.

“In the face of an invasion, the state has to defend itself with all means,” Buxadé stated. The government must use “all the measures at its disposal,” he demanded, including the “intervention of the Armed Forces and a naval blockade of the Canary Islands.”

The inaction of Podemos underscores that no serious fight against the ruling class’s anti-refugee policies can be waged through appealing to factions of the capitalist political establishment. The working class must unconditionally defend the right of workers across the world to live and work in the country of their choosing, with full citizenship rights and in safety. This can only develop in opposition to all the reactionary pseudo-left parties across Europe, who have fully collaborated with the brutal anti-migrant policies of the whole European Union, as part of a struggle for socialism.



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