

Podemos silent on Spanish generals' coup threats

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It is over 48 hours since *El País* published extracts of a letter signed by 73 retired officers, appealing to King Felipe VI to act against the elected Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government. They blame what they call “the social-communist government” for “the decomposition of national unity.”

It comes weeks after 39 retired Air Force commanders sent a similarly incendiary letter to both the European Parliament and the king. The letter asserted that the PSOE-Podemos government is overseeing the “annihilation of our democracy,” and assured the king of their “deep loyalty” to him.

While sections of the military are all but openly discussing a coup to install a dictatorship aimed against the working class, the “Left Populist” Podemos party has remained deafeningly silent. The government’s only official public reaction was that of Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister Margarita Robles, who intervened to defend the king in yesterday’s budget debate in parliament. Her intervention was loudly applauded from the Podemos bench.

Robles said: “The head of state belongs to everyone, not to some who with certain letters implicate the king.” The letters’ signatories, she said, “are not doing what they have to do as public servants or defending the values that characterise the military and military family.”

That is, the PSOE-Podemos government is passing over in silence the fact that sections of the officer corps are discussing a coup. Instead, they aim to protect the king’s reputation, even though the king has neither disavowed the letter nor explained why the Royal House had previously not disclosed the letters.

Robles did not announce any investigation of the letters’ signatories, their links with potential coup plotters among active-duty officers, or the extent of

fascist sentiment in the army. Instead, she extended her “recognition” to retired generals who are now parliamentarians of the fascist Vox party. Calling their fascist politics “a legitimate option,” she claimed that they are defending what “they think are the interests of the citizens. My gratitude goes to them even though we are so distant.”

The PSOE-Podemos government’s applause for Vox, whose leaders have hailed the bloodstained fascist dictatorship of general Francisco Franco, exposes its own reactionary role. The PSOE and Podemos are far more afraid of explosive opposition to their policies building up on their left among workers and youth, than they are about far-right coup plots against their own government.

This applies to an entire layer of political satellites of Podemos who are silent on the officers’ coup threats. The Pabloite *Anticapitalistas*, which left Podemos barely six months ago, has said nothing on the issue on its online paper *Poder Popular* or its online magazine *Viento Sur*. Revolutionary Left, the Spanish affiliate of the Committee for a Workers’ International, which works in Podemos, issued no statement.

Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras (Workers’ Revolutionary Current), the Spanish section of the Morenoite Trotskyist Fraction—Fourth International (FT-CI), has published a dozen articles in the past two days on the Spanish national edition of its online daily *Izquierda Diario*. However, not a single one of these articles on *Izquierda Diario* even refers to the generals’ letter.

They are silent because, while they technically remain outside Podemos, they are a barely-disguised wing of the PSOE-Podemos government. Rooted in the affluent middle class, they hope to benefit from close integration into the capitalist state machine and work to

suppress left-wing opposition among workers.

Podemos recently joined the commission that is distributing €140 billion in European Union (EU) bailout funds to the banks and corporations. It is implementing the EU's "herd immunity" policy on Covid-19 that has led to over 1.5 million infections and over 65,000 deaths in Spain alone, while claiming "there is no money" for a scientific fight against the virus. More broadly, it is continuing EU austerity, while showering the armed forces with billions of euros in military spending increases.

Moreover, Deputy Prime Minister and Podemos general secretary Pablo Iglesias also sits on the Intelligence Affairs Commission, the body that directs the activities of Spain's National Intelligence Centre (CNI).

As such, Iglesias receives regular reports from officials spying on all forms of political opposition in Spain. As *El Confidencial* recently reported, the CNI receives a report every 15 days from its Digital Observatory, which monitors thousands of web sites and social media for "disinformation," especially sites opposed to capitalism, the Spanish government, NATO and the EU.

The PSOE-Podemos government has used this information ruthlessly against left-wing opposition. Podemos joined the PSOE government just after the PSOE ordered a brutal police crackdown on mass protests by workers and youth against the jailing of Catalan nationalist political prisoners. At the outset of the pandemic this year, it sent police to assault steelworkers striking for the right to shelter at home to avoid infection.

Against far-right generals discussing a coup, however, Podemos has taken no public action. In 2018, over 1,000 retired top officers, including 62 former generals, signed a manifesto hailing Franco. A year later, retired Army Chief of Staff General Fulgencio Coll Bucher, a leading Vox member, wrote a piece in the right-wing daily *El Mundo* calling for the army to oust the PSOE. In September, a Vox-backed military protest to raise soldiers' wages and conditions marched through Madrid, for the first time since the Franco era.

The last thing Podemos wants to do is to alert workers to fascist conspiracies within the army. They are terrified that an event which brought together the mounting discontent among workers and youth at the

official handling of the pandemic and austerity, with the anti-fascist traditions of the European working class could lead to a political radicalization of the working class aimed against them.

They are consciously opposed to discussion of Francoism and the danger of a coup by Francoite elements in the Spanish ruling class. In a 2015 discussion with "post-Marxist" writer Chantal Mouffe, published in the book *Podemos in the name of the people*, Podemos co-founder Iñigo Errejón opposed discussing the lessons of Franco's victory in the Spanish Civil War and of working class struggles against the Francoite regime:

"I don't think many people would be interested in such a critique, and it is not very productive in political terms, either. Quite possibly at some point we will have to start a historiographical discussion, but I don't think that a revised form of nostalgia—let's say, moving away from the melancholy of the loser—is ever productive."

Errejón insisted that discussing a perspective and strategy for the working class to defeat fascism was of no particular relevance to contemporary Spain. Talking about the Spanish Civil War, he said, "scares the elderly, and doesn't mean much to the young, as it happened a long time ago. While we're clear on what side we'd take in such an argument, we also know that nostalgia doesn't win battles, but that defeats unfortunately build defeat. This is not an appeal to bury the whole subject, it's an appeal to fight within the terms of the time."

In fact, the danger of a fascist coup targeting mounting working class anger at social inequality, austerity and "herd immunity" policies is very much part of contemporary politics. The lessons of the 1930s are of burning actuality. These are first and foremost the necessity to mobilize the working class independently of the union bureaucracy and reactionary petty-bourgeois parties like Podemos, and to build a revolutionary political leadership in the working class to lead the struggle against capitalism and authoritarian rule.



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