

Spanish media promote Morenoite CRT amid mass youth protests

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Amid mass youth protests over the jailing of Stalinist rapper Pablo Hasél by the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, Spain's Morenoite party, the Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT), has suddenly received unprecedented coverage in capitalist media. The CRT runs the Spanish section of the *Izquierda Diario* web site, which it shares with Argentina's Socialist Workers Party (PTS) and France's New Anti-capitalist Party, a close ally of Podemos.

Last week, Catalan regional public broadcaster TV3 interviewed Pablo Castilla, a 21-year old member of the CRT's youth wing. Castilla appeared on its *Planta Baixa* (Ground Floor) programme covering social and political news, with debates and reporters on the street.

This launched an avalanche of promotion of the CRT by major international media last week. Castilla was interviewed along with CRT member Sergi Gonzalez by Reuters, and then by the BBC and a leading weekly magazine of the American bourgeoisie, *Time*. On local Barcelona channel *Teve.cat*, Pere Ametller, another CRT youth member, along with Castilla, are now regular participants in debates sponsored by OpinaYouth programme.

This focus on the CRT is the response of the media conglomerates to an explosion of social anger and opposition among workers and youth to the entire political set-up, including Podemos. At its founding in 2014 it promised "radical democracy" and social reforms, but today Podemos is associated with mass death and police state repression. It has ruthlessly implemented the herd immunity policy of letting the virus spread while keeping workers at work to keep making profits for the banks, leading to over 100,000 deaths and 2.5 million infections in Spain alone.

As anger mounts against its homicidal pandemic policy—together with mass unemployment, lack of access to health care, and poverty—Podemos has failed in all its efforts to silence opposition. It monitors social media and the Internet using the "Digital Security Law," sends police to crush strikes, and has banned protests and threatened to deploy the military. Now it is overseeing brutal police repression of youth protests in the past two weeks against Hasél's incarceration.

The CRT is putting forward youth who clearly aim to address anger among youth that has grown amid two major economic crises, NATO wars across the Middle East and North Africa, continual austerity, and now the COVID-19 pandemic. Castilla told *Time* that Hasél's arrest "is a brutal attack against freedom of speech ... The protests are being brutally repressed by the allegedly progressive national government and the Catalan government."

Gonzalez, 19, who has a temporary job as a warehouseman, told Reuters: "The Hasél case has been the spark that has set the fire ablaze," adding that the protests have combated "depression, anger and apathy" in the population caused by the recession and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Youth and workers coming into politics cannot escape, however, a settling of accounts with the petty bourgeois treachery that is epitomized by Podemos, but is also shared by an entire layer of pseudo-left groups. The CRT's *Izquierda Diario* web site garners millions of hits each month

with activist slogans that thinly mask its support for the pro-capitalist and "herd immunity" policies advanced by Podemos. It is more or less obvious that the media are promoting the CRT in the hope that they can build it up as a tendency that will advance policies similar to but less discredited than those of Podemos.

This media promotion of the CRT is, in short, a political trap for mounting working-class opposition to Podemos and similar pseudo-left parties across Europe amid the COVID-19 pandemic. It seeks to block rising working-class opposition across Europe from evolving into a direct struggle against capitalism and for state power on a socialist, internationalist program.

In his interviews, Castilla did not denounce the "herd immunity" policy of Podemos. Instead, he defended the CRT's line, which is fully acceptable to Podemos, opposing lock-downs and other basic public health measures needed to contain the pandemic as unacceptable infringements on freedom.

Asked what he was protesting beyond Hasél's incarceration, Castilla said: "I'm out on the streets because I have no future, jobs are precarious, 40 percent unemployment, the planet is being destroyed by big corporations, they have criminalised us [the youth] brutally during the pandemic, they have closed down our universities."

Castilla was working in the "herd immunity" perspective spelled out in CRT's January statement. It denounced social distancing, declaring that the PSOE-Podemos government was "limiting our liberties and movements at their will. ... Once again, they are forcing us into a life of home to work and work to our homes." Instead of calling for workers to shelter at home on full pay, and for aid to artists and small businesses, the CRT advocated reopening schools and universities, while admitting the safety of teachers and students "cannot be guaranteed."

While tacitly supporting the financial aristocracy's policy on the pandemic, the CRT also advances a pro-capitalist perspective on the political crisis in Spain. It calls for a broad regroupment of all forces that can agree to a call to abolish Spain's constitutional monarchy and build a Republic. That is, it is a barely concealed appeal to the middle-class periphery of Podemos, and to Podemos itself.

The CRT, Castilla said, is building a common platform with other student organisations to "organise assemblies in each university and school to fight the monarchy and all this repression." The weekend before, Castilla had intervened in a protest to call for turning "all this anger into organization. That is why we want to promote a great anti-monarchical student movement."

This demand, acceptable to broad layers of Podemos and of pro-austerity Catalan nationalist parties like the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), has no progressive, let alone socialist content. It is a politically ambiguous, pro-capitalist, nationalist demand aimed towards channelling discontent into changing the forms of the Spanish capitalist state, not its overthrow. A capitalist republic would not change the social problems facing workers and youth, which are rooted not in the Spanish

constitutional monarchy, but in world capitalism and the European Union.

Podemos routinely flirts with calls for a referendum on the monarchy—the better to manipulate widespread disgust among workers with the corruption and nepotism of the monarchy.

Moreover, calls to dispense with the Spanish monarchy do not originate only within the pseudo-left. Fascistic coup plotters within the army have also intimated that they could support the King's ouster if he does not back them against the elected government. The main ideologue behind last November's coup letter to King Felipe VI, José Manuel Adán Carmona, later wrote that if the King opposed their plans, "what is the role of the king? And others will ask, what's his purpose?"

Castilla's interviews also highlighted a critical aspect of the CRT's perspective: it has no intention of building a movement in the working class. Instead, it seeks to serve as political advisers to Podemos and, in Catalonia, to the separatist Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP), which is currently in talks to form a pro-austerity, police-state regional government. While advancing itself as a critic of some of their policies, the CRT wants to keep Podemos or the CUP from discrediting themselves so much that workers seek a Trotskyist alternative.

During the interview, Castilla warned: "I think many young people can look to the CUP as a reference to seek a political alternative and right now the investiture is being debated in [the Catalan] Parliament. I do not believe that all the youth who are taking to the streets and are being repressed by the police, would understand that the CUP gave support" to a regional Catalan government.

In Catalonia, the CUP went on to support two pro-austerity, separatist-led governments and supported two austerity budgets in 2016 and 2017. It is one of the chief promoters of building a new capitalist state in Catalonia, within the capitalist European Union, thereby dividing the working class along national lines. It also played a leading role in promoting the NATO intervention in Syria, on the pretext of helping Kurdish nationalist militias working with US Special Forces.

This simply underscores that the CRT seeks above all to build itself as a new, slightly modified version of Podemos itself. In one video of Castilla's intervention at a demonstration, he declares, "we have to organise ourselves in schools, universities, neighbourhoods Because we want a new 15-M, and this time they will not trick us like Podemos."

In fact, both Podemos and the CUP emerged from the 15-M movement. This movement, begun on May 15, 2011, was inspired by the revolutionary struggles in Egypt in 2011, and specifically by the occupation of Tahrir Square in Cairo that set off a mass general strike movement of the Egyptian working class. Hundreds of thousands of youth mobilised in cities across Spain in May 2011 against the PSOE-led government's savage austerity measures following the 2008 global economic crisis.

Without a political programme or leadership, these spontaneous gatherings, mainly mobilizing urban middle-class youth, though they enjoyed broad support among workers, ended in empty discussions dominated by groups like CRT and Pabloite Anticapitalistas. They did not challenge the PSOE, the Stalinist-led United Left or the trade union bureaucracy, the main vehicles for imposing austerity. Instead, they argued that "no leadership" and "no political parties" should emerge in the protests.

They based this rejection of an orientation to the working class on the populist, anti-Marxist theories of the late Ernesto Laclau and of Chantal Mouffe. In her 2018 formulation of the "left populist" strategy, Mouffe wrote: "What is urgently needed is a left populist strategy aimed at the construction of a 'people,' combining the variety of democratic resistances against post-democracy in order to establish a more democratic hegemonic formation. ... I contend that it does not require a 'revolutionary' break with the liberal democratic regime."

On this perspective Anticapitalistas, the Spanish affiliates of the French

NPA, used its influence in the 15-M and widespread media coverage to prepare the founding of Podemos three years later, in 2014. Through it, many figures of the 15-M were integrated into the state machine. Albert Garzón, the 15-M movement's spokesperson in Malaga, is now Podemos minister of consumer affairs. Ada Colau, former head of the PAH anti-eviction platform, is mayor of Barcelona. Yolanda Díaz, now labour minister, has presided over the official back-to-work drive amid the pandemic. Many more names could be added to this list.

Key political lessons must be drawn. Building a genuinely left-wing, socialist opposition to Podemos and its "herd immunity" policies on the global pandemic and to austerity requires building a movement in the European and international working class. That entails a conscious and determined break with the petty-bourgeois class orientation and anti-Marxist traditions represented by Podemos.

The lessons of the European workers' struggles against fascism in the 20th century are critical. Wide layers of the working population associate the toppling of the Spanish monarchy in 1931 and the establishment of the 1931-1939 Second Republic with an era of progress. However, a democratic regime could not be established by a bourgeois revolution. General Francisco Franco launched a fascist coup in 1936. The Second Republic proved impotent against the Francoites, who ruled over Spain from 1939 to 1978.

History vindicated Leon Trotsky's theory of Permanent Revolution, which states that the struggle to establish democratic rights requires a struggle led by the working class for socialism. The rise of far-right parties and the adoption of a fascistic "herd immunity" policy has exposed anti-Trotskyist parties like Podemos. As the WSWS noted when Podemos first entered into government in 2019:

"The fascist resurgence has exposed the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left. Its defense of capitalism and rejection of any policy that impinges the prerogatives of bourgeois property and wealth precludes any appeal to the working class. The role being played by Podemos essentially duplicates the treacherous role played by Stalinists and social democrats in the Spain of the 1930s. Their alliance with a section of the Spanish bourgeoisie in what was called a Popular Front ruled out revolutionary policies in the fight against General Franco and his fascist allies. The result was the crushing of the socialist revolution and Franco's victory."

These historical and strategic lessons must be learned. Fighting the pandemic and the police-state regime overseen by Podemos requires by an assault by the working class on capitalist property, to expropriate the financial aristocracy. The alternative to the reactionary policies of Podemos is not the petty-bourgeois politics of the CRT, but the fight to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, based on permanent revolution, in Spain and internationally.



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