

Madrid elections marked by mounting fascist death threats

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Campaigning for the May 4 regional elections in Madrid has descended into a political debacle. The month since snap regional elections were called by the ruling Popular Party (PP) has seen eight death threats on politicians, a court intervention to defend far-right Vox party's Nazi-inspired propaganda, fascist rallies in working class areas, and trumped up accusations of mail ballot fraud. Candidates also traded accusations of provoking mass COVID-19 deaths.

The election climate testifies to the advanced breakdown of democratic forms of rule in Spain and internationally. This is the product of an immense growth of social inequality and the policy of prioritising profits over lives during the COVID-19 pandemic—the “herd immunity” policy—for which the entire capitalist political establishment is responsible.

It unfolds amid a major political crisis in neighbouring France, where a letter signed by over 20 retired generals, and since signed by over 7,000 military personnel and backed by the far-right National Rally party, has threatened a coup. It also takes place barely four months after several thousand right-wing extremists organised by US President Donald Trump and sections of the Republican Party stormed the Capitol in Washington D.C. to try to nullify the US elections.

On Wednesday, a death threat letter with ammunition was sent to former Socialist Party (PSOE) Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, who has been out of politics for over a decade. It was the latest incident after similar death threats with bullets were sent to regional election candidates, including Podemos candidate Pablo Iglesias and PP incumbent Isabel Díaz Ayuso. Other letters have gone to Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska, general director of the Civil Guard María Gámez, and Industry and Tourism Minister Reyes Maroto.

One of the chief targets is Iglesias, who has been

hounded by far-right forces for over a year, coinciding with a rising fear in ruling circles of workers' opposition, expressed in strikes and calls for lockdowns, to the “herd immunity” policies on the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter warned, “Your wife, your parents and you are sentenced to capital punishment, your time is running out.” It came with four CETME bullets, a rifle used by the Spanish Army, Navy, Civil Guard and National Police.

The hatred of Iglesias in sections of the security forces sympathetic to Vox emerged Thursday, when *La Marea* revealed a Facebook page, “Primavera Española del CENEPE” (Spanish Spring of CENEPE), with 15,000 members, most linked to the security forces, attacking Iglesias. He is attacked as “son of the great b*tch, scum, trash rat ... I'm not saying what I would do with you because I'm buckled up;” “And he will always be the parasite friend of terrorists” or “Whoever sows winds gathers storms.”

Vox has unleashed violent propaganda against migrant children, directly inspired from the Nazis. Its billboards in Madrid show a dark-skinned youth, under the name MENA—a pejorative acronym for unaccompanied foreign minors—and “your grandma” spelled on the board. It states falsely that young migrants receive €4,700 while pensioners receive €426 monthly.

The aim of this disgusting campaign is to scapegoat children fleeing imperialist war, poverty and oppression—269 are under care in the Madrid region—for social crises produced by capitalism. On Friday, the courts refused to admit a complaint that the billboards constitute hate speech, arguing it constitutes freedom of expression.

Vox has met with strong opposition in working class neighbourhoods, where it has organised small provocative rallies, protected by anti-riot police sent in by the PSOE-Podemos government. Anti-Vox protesters have faced crackdowns, arrests and, according to one report, torture

in police custody.

The orgy of threats, fascistic propaganda and police violence unfolding in Madrid constitute a serious warning to the working class. Through attacks on pseudo-left politicians such as Iglesias, far-right forces are aiming at the growing anger in the working class against the deadly “herd immunity” policies in Spain and internationally.

Significantly, polls show that the incumbent PP may be reelected next week, and Vox may enter into the regional government. The latest polls show that the PP would be first with around 41 percent of the votes, followed by PSOE (21 percent), Más Madrid (16 percent), Vox (9–10 percent) and Podemos (7 percent). The PP has already promised to include Vox in a coalition government. This is in a region where PP-Vox policies have led to mass deaths. Madrid is the Spanish region with the most infections and deaths from COVID-19, around 24,000.

Internal documents showed that Madrid regional officials issued protocols with criteria to exclude nursing home residents from being transferred to hospitals at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has led to the deaths of thousands.

The PSOE and Podemos could not capitalise on PP-Vox crimes, having implemented the same policy at the national level, leaving over 100,000 dead and 3.5 million infected with COVID-19. This is why the pandemic was widely discussed at the start of the campaign but then quickly shelved as candidates realised that accusing each other of social murder was a zero-sum game. All of them had supported the same criminal policy.

There is deep, historically rooted opposition to fascistic forces and “herd immunity” policies in the European working class. However, the working class cannot entrust the struggle against this to the same parties, including the PSOE and Podemos that implemented this policy. Whatever “anti-fascist” rhetoric they cynically employed during the campaign, it is clear that the PSOE-Podemos government cannot and will not oppose a far-right authoritarian regime. On the contrary, it relies on far-right forces to implement its “herd immunity policy.”

Indeed, a key reason the far right feel emboldened is that PSOE-Podemos adopted the political agenda set by Vox. They worked hand in hand with the regional Madrid PP government backed by Vox to implement the EU’s “herd immunity” policy.

Last autumn, the central government threatened to deploy 7,500 soldiers against protests targeting the “restricted mobility” order imposed in the working class districts of Madrid amid the resurgence of COVID-19.

The order, worked out between the Madrid regional and Spanish national governments, required workers and youth to continue reporting to work and school. It imposed lockdowns only in working class areas.

The current, fourth wave, which has now unnecessarily claimed 5,000 lives, has been completely absent from the electoral debate. Instead, all candidates have agreed to Vox’s demand to end social distancing. The PSOE-Podemos government has spent days repeating that it will not extend the state of alarm, the legal mechanism to implement social distancing. Health Minister Carolina Darias repeated Vox’ mantra that “we can’t live forever with the state of alarm.”

Vox has ended its electoral campaign with a pledge to commit to six demands of the ultra-Catholic, fascistic Hazte Oír association if it enters a PP-led regional government—including lifting all travel restrictions aiming at stopping the spread of the coronavirus.

Fascistic forces pose a very real threat, and significant sections of workers and youth—including among Podemos, More Madrid and PSOE voters—hate everything Vox stands for. However, the Madrid elections show that the working class can only fight them based on its own party and programme. It is impossible to oppose fascistic forces based on the reactionary record of the PSOE, Podemos or their allies in the union bureaucracies.

Building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and beyond, and of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), independent of the union bureaucracies and the pseudo-left, is the only way the pandemic can be fought.



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