Spain’s PSOE-Podemos government to ban Castilian nationalist party

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The Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is moving to ban Izquierda Castellana (Castilian Left), a separatist-nationalist party active in central Spain.

The outlawing of a political party claiming to be socialist, republican and internationalist is part of an escalating campaign by the European ruling class on free speech and democratic rights, intensified with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Terrified at growing social opposition to “herd immunity” policies and bank and corporate bailouts which have left over 1.1 million dead across Europe, the ruling class aims to suppress all forms of opposition.

Podemos is playing a leading role in this attack on democratic rights. Drawn from the affluent middle class and based on the anti-Marxist postmodernist identity politics of race and gender, it is entirely devoted to protecting the privileges its members enjoy in the existing order. Podemos will use all means at its disposal to crush social opposition, as it carries out policies of austerity, war, and police repression, as well as the criminal “herd immunity” policy which has already led to the deaths of over 100,000 people in Spain of COVID-19.

This also constitutes a warning on the reactionary role that Podemos’ international allies like the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), Unsubmissive France (LFI) and the German Left Party will play. Were they to come to power, they would implement the same anti-democratic policies as Podemos.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) opposes the persecution of Izquierda Castellana (IzCa). It has unbridgeable political differences with IzCa, which promotes Castilian nationalism, seeking a “united Castille” involving Cantabria, Castile and León, Madrid, La Rioja and Castile-La Mancha. This works to divide workers along national lines, amid a decades-long promotion of Basque, Catalan and Galician separatism, and the whipping up of Spanish chauvinism.

Nonetheless, IzCa’s persecution is an attempt by the Spanish bourgeoisie to intimidate political opposition, set a precedent of groundless bans of political parties, and install a police-state climate.

On Friday, IzCa published a statement describing the attempted ban. It explains that the National Court, descended from the Public Order Court set up under the fascist Franco regime to punish “political crimes,” has notified them about a resolution sponsored by the PSOE-Podemos Ministry of Interior, through the Solicitor General of the State. The resolution “calls for the ‘extinction’ of Izquierda Castellana, that is, its disappearance as a legal political organisation.”

IzCa explains that the Ministry of Interior “is resorting to administrative tricks, arguing that IzCa’s statutes do not comply with the changes introduced by the Organic Law 3/2015 legislative reform of March 30, on the control of the economic-financial activity of Political Parties.”

Such tricks are ludicrous. Spain’s main opposition party, the conservative Popular Party, has been illegally financed by corrupt deals with big business for over two decades, and has never been threatened with a ban. In 2018, the Gürtel case demonstrated that the PP kept off-book accounts, stemming from a sweeping kickbacks-for-contracts scheme affecting scores of local and regional PP officials who awarded no-bid contracts to business networks. This money was then used to finance political campaigns and provide a lavish lifestyle to select politicians.

According to an official investigation, the PP had “a financing system outside the legal economic circuit” between 1990 and 2008.

“It is paradoxical,” IzCa states, “that a political organisation that … never in its entire history requested or received any subsidies from the state, will be outlawed based on such reasons, especially when most of the political parties that ostensibly breach the law and

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regulations on such matters are not even warned of such a possibility." The ban, IzCa adds, is part of an increasingly repressive policy of the Interior Ministry, "accentuated since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic."

IzCa is an alliance of Stalinist, feminist and petty-bourgeois Castilian nationalist groupings founded in 2002, including Comunero Left, Popular Castillian Unity, Revolutionary Castillian Youth, Castillian Women and a hard-line Stalinist group, the Communist Party of the Castilian People, which left soon afterwards.

An earlier attempted ban on IzCa was closed by the National Court in 2008. Its leaders, now-deceased former leader Doris Benegas and current general secretary Luis Ocampo have repeatedly been targeted. In 2012, Benegas was arrested on suspicion of organising an anti-government demonstration, the so-called Surround the Congress protest. In October 2014, Benegas was arrested at an anti-monarchy protest in Madrid, held for 24 hours and prosecuted. In that trial, prosecutors requested a year and a half in prison. Finally, Benegas and two others were acquitted.

The principal target of the PSOE-Podemos government's groundless threat to ban IzCa, a bankrupt organisation that poses no threat to Spanish capitalism, is not so much IzCa as the broader rise of political opposition in the working class. IzCa serves only as a pretext to try out methods of political repression as strikes, protests and broader opposition to "herd immunity" policies and bank bailouts mount among workers.

Podemos has stepped up its efforts to create not the "radical democracy" it promised, but a police state. The threat to ban IzCa takes place on the six-month anniversary of the jailing of Stalinist rapper Pablo Hasél on charges of insulting the Spanish state and the Bourbon monarchy. Hasél is the first musician imprisoned in Spain since 1978 and the fall of the fascist regime led by Francisco Franco.

Podemos has escalated internet censorship, whipped up a MeToo witch hunt against opera singer Plácido Domingo and implemented a fascistic anti-migrant policy. This has led to the drowning of over 2,000 migrants off the Canary Islands, a surge in violence against migrants across Spain and reports of sexual abuse of dozens of minors at PSOE-Podemos government-run migrant concentration camps.

The working class must oppose these authoritarian moves, beginning by opposing those who are ramming them through: Podemos and its pseudo-left hangers-on, who, while posting statements of solidarity with IzCa, continue to provide Podemos with a "left" cover.

This includes *Izquierda Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Left), formerly affiliated with the Committee for a Workers' International, which posted a statement against the "antidemocratic action," one more "proof of the authoritarian and reactionary character of the regime of 1978, but also of the drift to the right of the current Executive." It forgot to add that IR acts like a faction of Podemos. In last May's elections in Madrid, it proudly stated it distributed 120,000 leaflets, organised 70 campaign tables and produced 80 large banners calling for a Podemos vote.

Anticapitalistas, which left the PSOE-Podemos government last year to better suppress social opposition from the outside, has yet to publish a statement, or even an article on its online paper *Poder Popular*. Instead, it posted an empty, one-sentence tweet from its regional branch of Castilla y León, stating: "The Regime of [19]78 will not be able to bend the will of the people who take control of their future… We are still together, not a step back."

The Morenoite Revolutionary Workers Current posted a statement criticising the ban and calling for a "united front in defence of democratic rights and against the repression by the self-named 'progressive' government and the Monarchical regime." It did not mention whom this united front would include. However, the Morenoites have a long record of seeking alliances with satellites of Podemos like the Revolutionary Left and Anticapitalistas.

The force that can and must be politically mobilized against the police-state machine and to defend democratic rights is the Spanish and international working class, in opposition to the parties of the affluent middle class.

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