

Podemos escalates its promotion of Spanish militarism

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Every year, Spain holds the National Day or the Day of Hispanicity on October 12, commemorating its imperialist legacy, especially in South and Central America. Formerly known as the Day of the [Spanish] Race under the fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939 -1978), the celebration is an unabashed exaltation of Spanish chauvinism, nationalism, militarism and the monarchy.

This year, the celebration was held amid a right-wing campaign to defend the legacy of Spanish imperialism. On the eve of the national holiday marking Christopher Columbus's 1492 arrival in the New World, the leader of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), Pablo Casado, described Spain's violent colonial expansion to the Americas as “the most important event in history after the Roman empire.”

Casado added on Twitter: “Does the kingdom of Spain have to apologise because five centuries ago it discovered the New World, respected those who were there, created universities, created prosperity, built entire cities? I don't think so.”

The leader of the fascistic Vox party, Santiago Abascal, denounced US President Joe Biden's Columbus Day address. Biden, posturing as a critic of the brutality of Spanish colonialism, said the arrival of Columbus led to “a wave of devastation” for Native Americans. Abascal described Biden as “the lamentable president of the United States,” adding, “He has just attacked the great masterpiece of the Spanish conquest: the evangelisation. How proud we can feel about what our ancestors did,” he said, describing the Spanish colonies as “the empire of human rights.”

Amid this hysterical defence of Spain's barbaric record in its colonies by the ruling elite and media, the “Left Populist” Podemos party, the Socialist Party's (PSOE) the coalition partner in government, sent its

largest delegation to date to attend the October 12 military parade in Madrid. It was a signal of its readiness to defend past and future crimes of Spanish imperialism. Four Podemos ministers and a number of lawmakers shared a guest box with Abascal and Casado, as 2,656 troops marched down Castellana boulevard, followed by 115 vehicles and 68 aircraft overhead.

After the event, Podemos ministers attended the reception King Felipe VI grants to Spain's top civil and military leaders along with prominent members of the ruling class.

Podemos' new leader, the Labour Minister and Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, tweeted in support of the Spanish army, “Today our armed forces march and I want to show them respect and gratitude. A new country advances: one that protects, is plural and looks to the future.”

Podemos' unabashed militarism confirms the WSWs characterisation of these forces as pseudo-left. Podemos, like its sister parties internationally—the Democratic Socialists of America in the US, the Left Party in Germany, the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France and Syriza in Greece—articulate the interests of privileged sections of the upper middle class and defend capitalism against socialist revolution. These politically reactionary tendencies are pro-imperialist, supporting neo-colonialist wars and mounting imperialist provocations against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Founded in 2014, boasting it had entered Spanish politics to “democratise” the post-Franco regime and redistribute wealth towards the poorest, Podemos has instead channelled growing social opposition to capitalism back into the PSOE, the ruling classes' main party of government since the fascist Francoite regime

fell in 1978. The PSOE has a decades-long record as a party of imperialist war and European Union (EU) austerity.

Before getting into power, Podemos repeatedly promoted Spanish nationalism. It recruited leading members of the army, including former Air Force General and Chief of the Defence Staff Julio Rodríguez, the man who led the Spanish army's participation in the US-led neo-colonial wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and who played a major role in the 2011 NATO war on Libya. This resulted in over 30,000 deaths, a country in ruins and an ongoing civil war between the competing Islamist factions that NATO had supported.

Once in power in 2019, Podemos ceaselessly covered up coup threats within the army. It has attempted to lull workers to sleep, claiming the individuals involved were old and drunk, when former high-ranking officers declared their loyalty to Franco and called to kill “26 million” left-wing voters and their families, including all Podemos voters. These officers were then publicly praised by the far-right Vox party.

Podemos' then-General Secretary and Deputy Prime Minister, Pablo Iglesias, gave a prime-time television speech dismissing the threats, saying, “What these gentlemen say, at their age and already retired, in a chat with a few too many drinks, does not pose any threat.”

Once leaked videos revealed active-duty officers defending the former Francoite officers, soldiers dancing to neo-Nazi songs and making the fascist salute—exposing Iglesias' claims that there was no threat—Podemos pledged to call for an investigation. Two weeks ago, Podemos acquiesced to the Ministry of Defence's refusal to make these investigations' results public. In reality, Podemos is colluding with pro-fascist forces in the army to cover up the extent of far-right networks in the armed forces. Its aim is to lull workers to sleep as to the real threat they face.

The Spanish army is also set to receive its full funding in the latest PSOE-Podemos austerity budget being negotiated in parliament. According to a study by pacifist organisation Centre Delàs d'Estudis per la Pau, total military spending has increased by 9.4 percent this year, beating its earlier record rise from €19.7 billion in 2020 to €21.6 billion in 2021. This contrasts with what will be spent this year on fundamental social issues such as promoting employment (€7.4 billion), social

services (€5.2 billion) or housing (€2.2 billion).

All these figures show how Podemos not only protects but strengthens the military establishment. They expose claims that during a COVID-19 pandemic, there is no money to implement an eradication strategy and implement policies like shelter-at-home, stopping non-essential work and subsidising small businesses. Instead, the PSOE-Podemos opted for prioritising profits over lives, which has led to over 100,000 deaths. As the economy has now fully reopened, thousands of people are still becoming infected daily; weekly deaths are still over 100.

At the same time, even as COVID-19 continues to rage throughout the world, the PSOE-Podemos continues to invest more in weapons. In 2021, €2.3 billion will be spent, €177 million more than the year before, thus making sure its national arms manufacturers cash in on the global tinder box, as all the imperialist powers rearm and prepare for new great-power conflicts.

There is deep, historically rooted opposition in the working class in Spain and internationally to militarism and nationalism. However, middle-class groups like Podemos are hostile to this opposition to militarism and are neither willing nor able to mobilize the vast opposition that exists. The role of Podemos is a warning: the only way for workers and youth to oppose the drive towards disease, repression and war is to build Trotskyist parties, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), in opposition to the pseudo-left.



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