

Police massacre of immigrants in Melilla exposes Spain's PSOE-Podemos government

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The June 24 massacre of at least 37 refugees attempting to cross the Moroccan border into the Spanish enclave of Melilla has thoroughly exposed the “Left Populist” Podemos party as a reactionary petty-bourgeois tool of Spanish imperialism and the European Union. It is directly implicated in a horrific crime against migrants in Southern Europe.

Between 1,500 and 2,000 refugees and migrants, who had been camping in the Moroccan mountains surrounding Melilla, went to the city's border, hoping to scale the border fences. Through coordinated efforts of the Spanish Civil Guard and Moroccan gendarmerie, at least 37 refugees died and over 150 were injured. Eyewitnesses said they believed that the official death toll of 37 substantially underestimated the number of lives lost.

It may never be known how many died falling from the fence, trapped in the stampede, hit by police truncheons, rubber bullets, and tear gas, or left injured and unattended for up to 10 hours. With the full backing of the European Union (EU) and the Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, Morocco is digging mass graves to bury the corpses without autopsies, identification or investigation. Other refugees who survived, many with severe injuries, were handcuffed behind their backs, thrown into busses and sent to Chichaoua, 400 kilometres south of Casablanca.

The question of the extent to which Podemos participated in planning this massacre is directly posed. On the eve of the NATO Summit held in Madrid, Moroccan police stepped up repression of makeshift refugee camps near Melilla, destroying their tents and stealing food and belongings.

Two weeks before, on June 8, Spain's foreign affairs minister José Manuel Albares told Reuters that Spain, as host of the upcoming NATO summit, would push for migration to be considered a “hybrid threat” in NATO's new policy roadmap, like the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. As the WSWs noted, this amounted to an attempt of the Spanish and European bourgeoisie to justify stepped-up repression of refugees and interventions in North and sub-

Saharan Africa.

Ten days later, on June 18, Moroccan authorities launched raids against the camps where migrants usually take refuge. “There were several clashes in the mountains near Nador, about 15 kilometers from Melilla”, several witnesses told *El País*. The daily added that “raids continued between Wednesday June 22 and Friday June 24, complicating life [for refugees] in the forest. During those days, they faced [the police]”.

Adam, a young 21-year-old Sudanese man who managed to enter Melilla, told *El País* that the authorities gave them an ultimatum: “A police officer came alone and told us we had 24 hours to leave. ‘If you leave the mountain, we will not use violence, but if you refuse to leave, we will use live fire’. Our leader said we could not leave like this; about 1,000 of us gathered and that night we decided to go to Melilla the next morning”.

Another witness, Aiman, told *eldiario.es* that a week before the attempted crossing, “Moroccan raids in search of irregular migrants increased. It was increasingly difficult to stay in the north of Morocco: ‘There were raids all the time, we escaped ... until we saw that we couldn't wait any longer because of that unsustainable situation’, he says. ‘When the gendarmes came, they even took the lentils from us. They burned everything’”.

The Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) confirmed that security forces destroyed tents in which the refugees were staying the day before the massacre, and that they were left without food and their belongings were stolen. This was after a year of constant harassment of the refugees, who had no access to drinking water, medicine, opportunities to return home or request asylum.

After the massacre, the PSOE-Podemos government swung into action to describe the crossing as a “threat” to Spanish sovereignty in line with their aim for the NATO Summit. Spain's prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, described it as a “violent assault” and “an attack on the territorial integrity of Spain”. He cynically blamed “mafias that traffic in human beings”.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska described it as a “violent attack” by “2,500 immigrants”. Foreign Minister Albares said, “You have to put yourself in the shoes of the Moroccan gendarmerie”, adding, “NATO will defend every centimeter of Spanish soil”. While the Minister of Inclusion, Social Security and Migration, José Luis Escrivá, implored for empathy: “The work that Morocco does is not easy”.

The fascist tirades of the PSOE ministers received the complicit silence of Podemos. Two days after the massacre, at a government press conference, Equality Minister and Podemos leader Irene Montero remained silent. Asked five times by journalists on Podemos’ stance on the massacre, she remained completely mute, as the spokeswoman of the Government, Isabel Rodríguez, answered in her name. Government sources told *El Confidencial* that Montero’s silence was agreed between Podemos and Sánchez.

Montero only replied to a question about the new Trans Law her ministry has designed. Approved on the same day she agreed to remain silent in the press conference, she described the law as “a historic milestone in the rights of the LGBTI community, it is an indisputable advance that we are going to take care of and work to improve until the end”.

Montero’s claim that her government will expand LGBTI rights—while it also arms the neo-Nazi Azov battalion in Ukraine, deploys troops to Eastern Europe, imposes strike bans and austerity at home, and attacks migrants—typifies her party’s reactionary identity politics.

As shown by the US right to abortion, now overturned by far-right Republican-nominated judges in the Supreme Court, no democratic right is secure unless it is won in struggle by the working class. Rights, included those of migrants, must be conducted as a fight for the political independence and mass mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist programme against Podemos.

The day after Montero’s silence, Podemos spokesperson in parliament, Pablo Echenique cynically said: “We are horrified, not just as democrats, but as people, by the images that we have been able to see on the Melilla fence. Spain has to be at the forefront of the defense of human rights. That is why we have presented an initiative so that there is an independent investigation”.

An “independent” investigation backed by Podemos will whitewash the police and PSOE-Podemos ministers. In the 2014 Tarajal Massacre, the civil guards who shot rubber bullets and tear gas at migrants swimming to Spain’s other enclave in Morocco, Ceuta, leaving 15 dead, were exonerated. Judges have repeatedly closed the cases, initially claiming, “The migrants died because they placed themselves in danger”. In the second case, closed in 2020, the judge considered the police have acted rightly to

“dissuade”.

The Melilla massacre represents an escalation of the PSOE-Podemos’ commitment to the EU’s fascist “Fortress Europe” policy. This policy has claimed the lives of tens of thousands of refugees who drowned in the Mediterranean Sea, trying to flee the social catastrophe produced by imperialist wars and the legacy of the colonial subjugation of Africa and the Middle East.

With the Spanish ruling elite effectively shutting off any legal migration route into Spain, the Canary Islands sea crossing has become the currently deadliest route into Europe, surpassing Mediterranean crossings to Italy and Greece. Since Podemos joined the government, at least 2,000 migrants have drowned trying to reach the Canary Islands.

Those who reach the islands are interned in concentration camps built by the PSOE-Podemos government, in which migrants are deliberately imprisoned in unsanitary, inhumane conditions pending deportation. Like former US President Donald Trump, the government also implemented a policy of separating children and their parents before protests forced it to change policy. Last year, it implemented the calls of the fascist Vox to militarize border control by deploying the army, special forces and riot police to round up and expel thousands of desperate men, women and children.

A class gulf separates the sympathy towards the migrants felt by millions of workers from the anti-refugee policy of the PSOE-Podemos government and the EU ruling class. After the Melilla massacre, protests were held in over 60 cities and towns across Spain. Common chants included “these are not deaths, they are murders” and “no human being is illegal”. Posters were seen at the demonstration stating “border kills”, “all lives are worth the same” or “we are all immigrants”.



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