

Spain's Podemos adopts massive military budget amid war with Russia

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Last week, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government approved its 2023 Budget. Hailed by the bourgeois press for "historic" social spending measures, the Budget in fact contains Spain's largest increase in military spending in history. The budget is another devastating exposure of the imperialist militarism of the pseudo-left Podemos party.

US President Joe Biden has admitted in discussions to private donors that the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine threatens to unleash a nuclear apocalypse, but Podemos is using the war to implement longstanding rearmament plans of the Spanish military.

Podemos' budget offers workers minor hikes in social spending on items such as unemployment benefits, childcare grants, train travel and health care, for example—with €266.7 billion allotted to "social" issues. These rises are, however, largely overtaken by the over 10 percent surge of inflation in Spain and across Europe. By far the most significant measure in the 2023 budget is the increase in military spending, by a staggering 25.8 percent.

Military spending will total over €12.8 billion next year, up from around €10 billion in 2022. This plan is in line with Madrid's commitment to NATO to increase its defence budget to 2 percent of GDP by 2029. Military expenditure will reach 1.2 percent of GDP next year under this Budget. The rest of the increase comes from €4.9 billion of investment in "special modernisation programmes," most of which will go to Spanish armament companies. This represents a 72 percent increase on the roughly €2.9 billion allotted to these plans in 2022.

In an attempt to render these reactionary and dangerous measures palatable to the Spanish working class, which holds deep-seated anti-war sentiments, the PSOE-Podemos government has championed the

"special modernisation programmes" as positive developments for job creation. According to a statement from the Ministry of Defence, these schemes "will contribute to creating 22,667 new jobs either directly or indirectly."

According to data from the pacifist institute Delàs Center for Peace Studies, Madrid's real military spending—which includes, besides the Ministry of Defense budget, the rest of the items of a military nature distributed in other portfolios—will be 27 billion euros, the equivalent of 75.7 million euros per day. In its report posted on Tuesday, it stated that "If these budgets are approved, Spain will already exceed NATO's spending target by 2023, dedicating 2.17% of its GDP to military spending." According to this calculation, "for every ten euros that the state invests in 2023, three will be for weapons."

The massive hike in military expenditure comes amidst NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine, to which the Spanish government has already allocated millions of euros in arms, ammunition and training for Ukrainian troops. With this new Budget, the PSOE-Podemos coalition government is doubling down on its commitment to the warmongering of the NATO alliance in Ukraine, even as this conflict threatens to escalate into a nuclear confrontation.

In addition to the military expenditure increases, the Budget also includes increases in social spending, that will be eaten by inflation. Year-on-year inflation reached 10.5 percent in August, dropping only slightly to 9 percent in September. The Budget includes:

- An increase of the IPREM rate—a measure used to determine the level of various welfare benefits—from its current €579 to €600 a month. This equates to an uptick of only 3.6 percent.
- A monthly €100 tax rebate given to working mothers

with children up to three years of age. This tiny sum will do little to help either working or non-working mothers, many of whom are already struggling to feed, clothe and house their children as the cost of living soars. As of August this year, the prices of core food items had risen 13.8 percent as compared to the same time in 2021; clothing costs had increased by 5.6 percent; and housing expenses had grown by an enormous 24.8 percent.

• **Minor increase in unemployment benefits.** Currently, an unemployed worker receives 70 percent of their salary (what they were earning in the 180 days before losing their job) in benefits for the first six months of their unemployment, a sum which drops to 50 percent from the seventh month. Under the new budget, this will rise to 60 percent, affecting around 300,000 people.

- Pensions and the minimum wage will remain stagnant, as they will be pegged to the inflation rate, leading to no improvement in real terms for millions of workers.

• **The health care budget will also go up by 6.7 percent,** a rise which is well below the current inflation rate and will leave already struggling health systems starved of funds. The same as with Education, increasing by 6.6 percent.

The fact that this year's Budget includes "record" social spending measures is not due to any genuine commitment by the PSOE-Podemos government to ensuring decent living conditions for the Spanish working class. Instead, the budget effectively slashes the real, inflation-adjusted value of social benefits while funneling massive resources into the military.

Podemos, the PSOE's junior partner in government, has responded to the Budget by celebrating the social spending measures, all while falsely attempting to present itself as an opponent of the military spending increase. In a statement on Twitter last Tuesday, Podemos spokesperson Pablo Echenique claimed that his party had somehow been tricked into passing the Budget, without knowing that defence expenditure had been raised.

Echenique stated: "We are not going to break apart the government because of the PSOE's disloyalty, because it would be very irresponsible when we have [right-wing PP leader Alberto Núñez] Feijóo and [far-right Vox party leader Santiago] Abascal sharpening

the knives. But I want to say clearly that they [the PSOE] have hidden this unilateral increase in defence spending from us and that it is a disgrace."

Similarly, Podemos party leader and Minister for Social Rights Ione Belarra claimed that her party had "opposed head-on in this negotiation any increase in military spending." But as Podemos does not constitute the "majority in government," she asserted, it is difficult to turn this "stubbornness" into a "reality."

The narrative that military spending increases had somehow been snuck into the Budget behind the backs of innocent Podemos ministers quickly imploded, however. On Wednesday, it was revealed that Yolanda Díaz, Podemos Minister of Labour and Spain's Second Deputy Prime Minister, had agreed with PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez that Podemos would not oppose the increase in military spending. Podemos sources involved in negotiations with the PSOE also told *El Diario* that they had informed the party's leadership about the Budget's defence spending increases.

In reality, Podemos' protestations are nothing more than empty words, seeking to obscure the party's real role as a member of an imperialist government committed to policies of war abroad and austerity and repression at home. Terrified at mounting social opposition, Podemos is forced to put forward political stunts, while reassuring its commitments to Spanish imperialism.

It is the living example that the installation of pseudo-left parties into power—including the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) in the US, the Left Party in Germany, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France, Syriza in Greece and the rump of the Labour Party "left" in the UK, formerly led by Jeremy Corbyn—will not put an end to imperialist war and the threat of nuclear Armageddon. All of these pseudo-left formations represent a privileged upper-middle-class stratum with a vested interest in defending capitalism.



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