

Spain's Podemos rejects inquiry into Melilla massacre of migrants

Alejandro López
4 December 2022

The “Left Populist” Podemos party has refused a parliamentary inquiry into the June 24 massacre of 37 refugees in Melilla, joining its social-democratic government partner, the Socialist Party (PSOE), the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the neo-fascist Vox party. This came after *El País* released a joint investigation with *Lighthouse Reports*, *Le Monde*, *Der Spiegel* and *Enass* showing that at least one death likely occurred on Spanish soil. Podemos is leading a cover-up.

On June 24, 2,000 migrants from war-torn and poverty-stricken Chad, Niger, Sudan and South Sudan tried to cross the border between Morocco and Spain's North African enclave of Melilla. Spanish border police fired tear gas canisters and rubber bullets to drive them back. On the other side, Moroccan gendarmerie, using batons, tear gas and smoke guns, cornered hundreds of migrants along the walls of a courtyard along the border. Spanish police refused to open the doors, beating and tear-gassing migrants instead. The savage repression provoked a deadly stampede.

The combined effects of the tear gas, migrants falling from the top of a 6-metre-high fence as they were shot with rubber bullets, and the stampede left many dead. Afterwards, the combined efforts of Spanish and Moroccan police to deprive the injured of the necessary medical attention increased the total.

UN experts put the death toll at 37. The Moroccan Association for Human Rights, says that at least 77 people are dead or missing. The death toll was the highest-ever on the land border between the European Union (EU) and the Maghreb, including the 2014 infamous Tarajal Massacre, when heavily armed police fired tear gas and rubber bullets on migrants attempting to swim across Ceuta. This left 15 dead, most of them drowning after suffocating on tear gas in the water.

Spain's ombudsman found that as many as 470 migrants who had managed to cross to the Spanish side were sent back across “with no consideration for their national or international legal rights.” Thirteen migrants who crossed the border received two-and-a-half-year jail sentences in Morocco.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez reacted to the massacre with a fascistic tirade, claiming it was a 'well-organized, violent assault' by organised crime groups, and thanked Spanish and Moroccan security forces for their actions.

Podemos remained silent. Two days after the killings, at a press conference, Irene Montero, minister for equality and leading member of Podemos, refused to take a position on the massacre despite being asked by journalists five times. It later emerged that her silence had been agreed upon between the PSOE and Podemos.

The question of to what extent the PSOE-Podemos government instigated the massacre remains open. On the eve of the June NATO Summit held in Madrid, Moroccan police stepped up repression of makeshift refugee camps near Melilla, destroying their tents and stealing food and belongings. It took place as Spain lobbied to include migration as a “hybrid threat” targeted by NATO. As the WSWS noted, this amounted to an attempt of the Spanish bourgeoisie to justify stepped-up repression of refugees from North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Successive investigations have revealed the criminality of the PSOE-Podemos government. Last month, the BBC released a documentary, 'Death on the Border,' showing how the actions of police in both Spain and Morocco triggered a stampede.

After the revelations that deaths likely occurred on Spanish soil, Spanish Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska insisted “there were no deaths in

Spanish territory,” adding that Guardia Civil officers acted “totally within the law and with the necessary proportionality required by events.”

Fifteen days ago, Podemos had called for a commission of enquiry into the massacre. This was just the latest request, after similar petitions in September and November were rejected by the PSOE, PP and Vox. Podemos no doubt hoped that a commission would whitewash those responsible—above all, Podemos itself and the PSOE in the Spanish government—for deadly anti-migrant policy.

Marlaska defended border police actions as “appropriate,” adding: “We did not have to lament any loss of human life in our national territory. The tragic events occurred outside our country.” He defended the fascist actions of the Spanish police, stating: “The insinuation that I have heard and read that our security forces would have permitted that these tragic events occur in our country is a grave irresponsibility.”

Since the revelations in *El País*, moreover, Podemos has backed down from its call for a commission of enquiry. Last week in parliament, Podemos spokesperson and general secretary of the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain, Enrique Santiago, criticized Marlaska but refrained from calling for a commission and Marlaska’s resignation.

De Santiago cynically requested Marlaska, who has repeatedly lied about the massacre, to be ‘clear about what happened’, and demanded ‘corrections for the future’, such as the possibility that migrants could request asylum at the border in Ceuta and Melilla.

El País noted, “Podemos has promoted similar requests for a commission twice in the past ... and now, in this context of noise and controversy on various fronts and ministries of the coalition [government], it is clear that ‘they are part of the of a Government’ and, therefore, they do not want to ask for resignations or disapprovals of ministers.”

The cover-up of this crime and the unconditional defence of the border guards is a further devastating exposure of the imperialist militarism of the pseudo-left Podemos party. Founded in 2014 by the Pabloite Anticapitalistas party and Stalinist professors—supposedly to “democratize” political life, dismantle anti-migrant policies and attack the “political establishment” for using immigrants as scapegoats—Podemos is now implementing the policies

of Vox.

The PSOE-Podemos government’s commitment to EU’s fascist “Fortress Europe” policy targeting migrants has claimed thousands of lives. With the Spanish ruling elite effectively shutting off any legal migration route into Spain, the Canary Islands crossing is now the deadliest route into Europe, surpassing Mediterranean crossings to Italy and Greece. Since Podemos joined the government, at least 2,100 migrants have drowned trying to reach the Canary Islands.

Those who reach the islands are interned in concentration camps built by the PSOE and Podemos, in which migrants are imprisoned in unsanitary, inhumane conditions pending deportation. This also included a policy of separating children and their parents before protests forced it to change policy.

Last year, in May 2021, over a year before the Melilla Massacre, the PSOE-Podemos government, backed by EU, reacted to desperate migrants crossing from Morocco into Spain by deploying the army and special forces. This was the first time the army was deployed, signaling the government’s readiness to use mass violence to stop refugees. Spain’s then sent hundreds of unaccompanied child migrants back to Morocco, in flagrant violation of international law.

As the WSWs noted at the time, the Melilla Massacre underscores the brutality and disregard of basic democratic rights that pervades the EU. It is part of the resurrection across Europe of forms of state-organised violence and political reaction not seen since Europe’s domination by authoritarian and fascist regimes during the 1930s.

The massacre is also a warning. As workers enter into struggle against inflation, austerity, militarism and attacks on democratic rights, they face in Podemos a determined enemy of the working class, ready and willing to use deadly force against workers and youth.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact