

Spain's PSOE-Podemos government calls for “social peace” as mass protests sweep France

Alejandro López
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The eruption of the class struggle in France against President Emmanuel Macron and his pension cuts has staggered Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government. It is currently imposing its own pension cuts, designed with the European Union. At the same time, it cynically claims its “social dialogue” with government-affiliated union bureaucracies, like the Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT), make mass protests unnecessary in Spain.

In last weekend's PSOE Federal Committee meeting, Spanish Prime Minister Sánchez said: 'We have ruled using dialogue, reaching great agreements and guaranteeing something very important, social peace,' he declared, citing the pension reform agreed with the European Union and the trade unions over the past weeks as an example.

In reality, the PSOE-Podemos pension cut shows that, to defend living standards, workers in Spain have no choice but to launch a direct political struggle against the capitalist state, as in France.

The PSOE-Podemos pension cut will increase the number of years whose income level is averaged to calculate the amount of the pension a worker receives, from 25 to 29 years of contributions. This will further cut pension levels. Both the CCOO and UGT called the reform “historic.” After the 2008 capitalist crisis, the PSOE government worked with the UGT and CCOO to impose a reform on public pensions to increase retirement age until age 67, hailed as a success of “social dialogue”.

Sánchez repeated his cynical calls for “social dialogue” during a no-confidence vote tabled by the far-right Vox last week, as protests continued to erupt across France's major cities. Sánchez said the PSOE-Podemos government “is capable of carrying out the reforms that the country needs, guaranteeing something very precious that we lost during the financial crisis and the neoliberal

response, which is social peace”.

Days later, during a press conference held in Brussels last Friday, Sánchez cynically criticized the right-wing Popular Party (PP) for calling for Macron-style attacks on workers' pension. Sánchez claimed that “reforms do not have to cause social pain”, stressing that “it is evident that today there is social peace, which is essential for far-reaching reforms, as was the labor reform.”

These reactionary positions endorsing the strangulation of the class struggle are, of course, shared by the PSOE's coalition partner, the pseudo-left Podemos party. In December, Podemos' de-facto leader and Minister of Labor, Yolanda Díaz, said in a state visit to Argentina that 'I am a great defender of social dialogue, it is a factor of social peace. We need strong unions to have strong democracies'.

The mind-numbing repetition of “social dialogue” and “social peace” is a sign of fear rather than of strength in the ruling circles. For the past three years, the PSOE-Podemos government has imposed the dictates of the financial aristocracy in close collaboration with the unions. This included the disbursement of massive EU bailout funds to corporations and banks, the imposition of a reactionary labor reform, below-inflation wage increases affecting millions of workers, and Spain's multi-billion-euro military rearmament plan.

In reality, social anger is reaching explosive levels in Spain, Sánchez's praise of “social dialogue” and “social peace” notwithstanding. The unions are deeply discredited after decades of social austerity and multi-trillion bank bailouts. Since the 1991 Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union, levels of inequality has soared. These are incompatible with democratic forms of rule, as testified most clearly in France, where Macron has torn the “democratic” mask off of the capitalist state, exposing it as a dictatorship of the financial oligarchy.

Under Podemos, Spain's Ibex stock market index, like

other stock markets across Europe, has hit record profits as inflation impoverished workers. As Macron in France, it uses both the union bureaucracies and the police agencies as weapons to attack the working class.

On the one hand, the PSOE-Podemos government has relied on the bureaucracies to act as domestic labour police, to impose salary increases below inflation level, as average prices soared to 8.4 percent. According to the Ministry of Labour, average salaries rose last year by 2.8 percent in 3,084 collective agreements negotiated between the unions and companies, affecting 9 million workers.

Whenever the unions could not prevent strikes, the PSOE-Podemos government resorted to mass violence. Over the past 16 months, it has deployed armoured vehicles against striking metalworkers and 23,000 police against the three-week nationwide truck drivers' strike. It was the largest police deployment and scabbing operation against a strike in Spanish history.

The government has also repeatedly resorted to minimum service legislation to break strikes, most recently on health workers and airline crew. Aware that the unions are increasingly losing control, the government is now preparing to review the penal code to criminalise protests and strikes.

Last Thursday, the PSOE-Podemos' delegate of the government of the region of Madrid, Mercedes González, tried to ban a solidarity march with French workers coinciding with mass strikes across the Pyrenees. González is notorious for trying to ban a protest in Madrid in November 2021 in solidarity with 9-day, 22,000-strong strike, of metalworkers in Cádiz.

The PSOE-Podemos government rejected a request for organising a protest – a formality which has increasingly become a means of banning protests, violating the elementary right to freedom of speech and assembly. It then deployed a large police contingent and riot police, who surrounded the protesters and took down the identity of a dozen people before the start of the rally. Podemos has maintained a complicit silence on this.

Moreover, this last weekend, tens of thousands demonstrated in Andalusia, Madrid and the Canary Islands to defend public education.

Across Europe, the ruling classes are increasingly terrified at the objectively revolutionary confrontation emerging between the workers and the capitalist state as real wages collapse, and the COVID-19 pandemic and the NATO war on Russia in Ukraine shake the economy. A wave of strikes against austerity and inflation by millions of workers is exploding across Europe—in Germany,

Britain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands and beyond.

Class struggles will bring workers into headlong conflict with pseudo-left forces like Podemos and the union bureaucracies. As the Parti de l'égalité socialiste, the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, states in “Bring down the Macron government!”:

“Since the working class cannot rely on establishment parties and union bureaucracies to fight ..., they need to build new organizations of struggle: rank-and-file committees, independent of the union bureaucracies and their “social dialog” with Macron. Such committees can organize strikes and protests, rally support for workers threatened by police, and oppose the demobilizing influence of the establishment parties.

“United internationally in the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, they will allow workers to rally support from growing class struggles outside France. This acquires decisive significance as workers strike against inflation and to defend wages in Germany and Britain, in rail strikes in Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy, and in teachers strikes in Portugal and across Europe. These struggles objectively are uniting workers in a common fight against inflation and austerity, ruinous military spending amid the NATO war on Russia, and police-state rule.



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