

The campaign against Spain's Luis Rubiales over “the kiss”

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Spain's media and broadcasters around Europe and internationally have been reporting and commenting at great length on the kiss delivered by Royal Spanish Football Federation (RFEF) President Luis Rubiales, on the lips of midfielder Jennifer Hermoso. Rubiales is also a vice president of UEFA, European soccer's governing body.

The now notorious incident occurred on August 20, during the medal awarding ceremony following Spain's women's soccer team winning its first World Cup, against England. As is to be expected, aside from the kiss itself, captured on film when Rubiales puts his hands on either side of Hermoso's head and kisses her on the mouth, everything surrounding the event is contested.

After the match, interviewed by right-wing radio station COPE, Hermoso initially said “it was the emotion of the moment, there is nothing beyond it. It will remain an anecdote. Very sure that it won't go any further.” She added that she did not “like it” and that “she did not expect it.”

As the kiss started trending in social media, Rubiales reacted by calling his critics “idiots”, “dickheads”, and “losers” on COPE. Soon after, Spain's football association is alleged to have approached Hermoso and her family to make a video together in his support. Rubiales then published an apology video recorded while on a layover returning from Australia—where the final was held—stating that he was sorry for distracting from the celebration.

Last Friday, August 25, facing mass media coverage, demands for him to step down and even to be prosecuted, and with film also circulating of him grabbing his crotch as an insult to the opposing team, Rubiales delivered a speech at the RFEF. He insisted that the kiss had been “spontaneous, mutual, euphoric and consensual,” accused his critics of practicing “false feminism” in an attempt at “character assassination” and refused repeatedly to resign, drawing applause from executives in the room.

Hermoso issued a statement that same day saying, “I want to make clear that the conversation that Mr. Luis Rubiales references did not happen in any moment, and much less that his kiss was consensual... I felt vulnerable and a victim of aggression, an impulsive act, sexist, out of place and without any type of consent from my part. In short, I wasn't respected.”

That day, Spain's acting Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government filed a complaint in the Sports Administrative Council alleging “serious misconduct” and urging suspension. The following day, 81 players, including all 23 from the championship-winning squad, released a joint statement pledging to boycott the national team until there were changes to the RFEF leadership. FIFA announced it was suspending Rubiales for 90 days as a disciplinary committee investigates his conduct.

On Monday, August 28, after a weekend of protests on the streets of Madrid, the heads of the regional bodies making up the RFEF posted a statement calling for Rubiales to “resign immediately as president of the RFEF.” His mother, Angeles Bejar, went on hunger strike in a church in Motri demanding an end to the “inhuman and bloody hunt that they are doing with my son.” She was hospitalized after three days before being released.

Prosecutors at Spain's top criminal court, the High Court, have now opened a preliminary investigation into Rubiales's kiss on the grounds it could constitute a crime of “sexual assault.” Prosecutors said they would offer her a chance to file a lawsuit within 15 days.

Rubiales has since sent video footage to the FA of Hermoso and her teammates laughing and joking about the incident while travelling on the team bus and collectively chanting “Kiss! Kiss!” when he boarded.

A storm of cynical outrage

Rubiales is being subjected to a ferocious witch-hunt and cast as Spain's number one hate figure by the media, in a campaign Spain's politicians are only too happy to see drown out the major political issues confronting the working class in the middle of a post-election crisis in which even forming a government is difficult.

Liberal publication *Público* even placed the campaign against him in a timeline of the “feminist revolution in Spain” over the past decades, alongside the case of Ana Orantes Ruiz, a victim of gender violence who was killed by her ex-husband after providing her testimony on a television programme, and the case of the Wolfpack (La Manada), when an 18-year old woman was raped by five men, including a Civil Guard and a soldier—thereby equating the kiss with a gang rape and murder.

Even the United Nations Human Rights Council posted a statement stating, “We join Spain's Jenni Hermoso and all those working to end abuse and sexism in sport. Make this a turning point.”

Leading this barrage is the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Sumar, which incorporates the PSOE's former coalition partner Podemos, backed by the trade union bureaucracy, the top courts in the country and the entire pseudo-left milieu. In the process the entire political narrative in Spain has been shifted to a national crusade against “machismo”, in which political criminals of all stripes are parading as virtuous representatives of a “New Spain.”

Spain's acting prime minister, Pedro Sánchez of the PSOE-

Podemos government, said that Rubiales' behaviour was unacceptable and the apology not adequate. Podemos' Minister of Equality Irene Montero, the partner of former Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias, said Rubiales' speech on Friday "normalises sexual violence." Her "obligation as a minister, woman, and feminist is to call things by their name: a non-consensual kiss is sexual violence."

Spain's Deputy Prime Minister Yolanda Díaz, who leads Sumar, demanded the witch-hunt against Rubiales be expanded to all those football executives who applauded his speech. "[T]hey inflicted more damage, more pain, more vexation," she said.

The trade unions, Podemos-linked Workers Commissions (CCOO) and the PSOE-aligned General Workers Union (UGT), likewise called for Rubiales' resignation.

This is unbridled cynicism from individuals and organisations totally unconcerned with democratic rights. This is the same government that is sending hundreds of millions of euros in weaponry to the neo-Nazi Azov battalion in Ukraine to wage war against Russia. In his last trip to Kiev in July, Sánchez promised the EU's support for Ukraine "as long as it takes" and "regardless of the price that has to be paid," as Ukraine launched a "counteroffensive" that has cost at least 40,000 Ukrainian lives, and permanently disabled or disfigured tens of thousands more.

As for Montero's outrage, back in June 2022, she agreed with the PSOE to keep silent about the barbaric Melilla massacre committed by her government when the repression of Spain's border security forces led to a stampede killing at least 37 refugees. With 76 others still missing, the final death toll is probably over 100. Podemos has since rejected a parliamentary inquiry into the massacre, joining the PSOE and neo-fascist Vox in the cover-up.

Díaz is the most visible leader of Podemos after Iglesias left government in 2021. In July's general elections her newly founded Sumar continued Podemos' reactionary domestic policies, including pension cuts and a labour reform; handouts of €140 billion European Union bailout funds to corporations and banks; and the profits-over-lives policy in the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to over 160,000 deaths.

She is so despised that she was forced to end her campaign speech at a rally in the city of Cádiz in July after a group of 50 metalworkers jeered her. Metalworkers strikes have been savagely suppressed by Díaz's PSOE-Podemos government.

As for the trade unions, they have suppressed and sabotaged one struggle after another over the past years, acting as labour police to ensure war abroad and class war at home continues.

The right-wing identity politics of the affluent middle class

"The kiss" has become an occasion for the type of cultural posturing over "the patriarchy" that has long been the specialty of the PSOE and the Sumar/Podemos milieu—used to conceal their shared right-wing agenda while cultivating a social base in a narrow section of the middle class for whom identity politics is a mechanism through which to fight for their own social advancement.

Railing against patriarchy is invariably tied to demands for more female representation in boardrooms, the higher echelons of academia, the civil service and government—and of course for equal pay for female footballers, actresses, etc., as a popular presentation of these

demands.

By contrast it is never associated with opposition to the super-exploitation and social distress suffered by workers, female or male. Nor is there any concern expressed over the issues that are being deliberately buried by the PSOE and Podemos, the escalation of the US-NATO war against Russia; growing signs of a deeper economic crisis; another surge of the pandemic; the developing climate disaster that has led to droughts and wildfires; and the rise of the far-right Vox in Spain and its counterparts internationally.

The pseudo-left organisations orbiting Sumar and Podemos have all enthusiastically joined the fray, ending their usual long summer break to bestow absurd plaudits on a cynical campaign animated by the affluent-middle-class supporters of the PSOE and Podemos. Revolutionary Left published five articles in seven days. Its feminist Free and Combative front declares, "The force of the feminist movement has turned upside down some of the great redoubts of power and the most recalcitrant machismo."

Cynthia Luz, from the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT), made the most direct and galling attempt to connect the events with the plight of workers, writing, "The feminist movement that woke up with MeToo gave a voice to all women harassed by patriarchal machismo. The *SeAcabó* [ItsFinished] of the athletes will become a loudspeaker for all the workers and young people 'without a voice' who in the dark workplaces are daily despised and ignored."

The hysterical character of the demands for Rubiales to be prosecuted have even allowed the neo-fascists of Vox to posture as defenders of democratic rights and common sense, appealing to wide layers of the population who, while objecting to Rubiales' action, do not see this as sexual assault. Vox leader Santiago Abascal declared yesterday, "All this controversy has been generated by the Sánchez government and its media terminals to hide the great problems confronting Spain", adding, "With common sense you can distinguish what is rudeness or bad education from what is a crime."

Under conditions where Spain's ruling class is not even able to form a stable government, political posturing over Rubiales and suffocating levels of media attention are being employed as a soporific with the deliberate intention of disorienting the working class. Class-conscious workers and youth must steadfastly oppose the campaign being whipped up by the political establishment and media. Its hysterical nature essentially reflects the fear of the ruling class that it is losing its political-ideological grip on the working class under conditions of a global upsurge of the class struggle in Spain, Europe and internationally.



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