

Spain's social democratic UGT union bureaucracy defends Israeli war on Gaza

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Hundreds of thousands of young people and workers continue to demonstrate across Spain and around the world in defense of the Palestinian people in a wave of solidarity that, far from stopping, is growing with increasingly massive demonstrations. But while workers and youth are demanding an end to the Israeli state's NATO-backed genocide against Gaza, Spain's national union bureaucracies are openly supporting the Israeli war on Gaza.

On October 10, Pepe Álvarez, the head of Spain's social-democratic General Union of Workers (UGT), joined a rally in front of the Israeli embassy called by pro-Zionist groups. The rally, attended by only a few dozen people, was in support of Israeli military aggression. At that event, Álvarez stood next to prominent members of the right-wing Popular Party and the neo-fascist party VOX, which works in the antisemitic tradition of Francoism.

Álvarez later met with the Israeli ambassador in Madrid. In a message published on X/Twitter, he explained: "We have met with the Ambassador of Israel. We have shown solidarity with the victims of the Hamas attacks and demand the freedom of their hostages. We ask Israel to respect the civilian population and move towards the two-state solution within the framework of dialogue and the UN."

Álvarez's meetings with top Israeli officials underscores that a movement can be built in the working class against the war in Gaza only in a rebellion against the bureaucracy. Critical initiatives such as the Barcelona port workers' refusal to load weapons shipments for Israel can develop into a broader international movement only if workers take the struggle out of the hands of figures like Álvarez.

Álvarez repeats the genocidal propaganda of the Israeli state, Washington and its European allies. Like theirs, his statement ignored the illegal blockade Israel has imposed

on Gaza for 17 years, turning it into an "open-air prison," and the systematic oppression of the Palestinians since they were expelled from their lands in 1948 to make way for the establishment of the Israeli state.

To condemn "Hamas attacks" is to cover up for imperialism. October 7 saw a mass uprising of an oppressed people, an uprising the Israeli government has seized upon to initiate a savage campaign of ethnic cleansing, targeting hospitals, mosques, schools, ambulances, and entire families fleeing northern Gaza, killing over 10,000 Palestinians.

Talking with the Israeli ambassador about a two-state solution is preposterous. Previously, this was a bankrupt perspective for the construction of a small, isolated Palestinian enclave alongside Israel, which would continue to serve as an outpost for imperialist forces and intrigues in the oil-rich Middle East. However, such a "solution" is now rejected by the Israeli government out of hand.

The end of the "two-state solution" has paved the way to Netanyahu's "final solution": Israel plans to ethnically cleanse Gaza. Those who are not killed by bombing and starvation will be driven into tent cities in the Sinai Desert, the Negev, or another barren wasteland. And in the West Bank, settlers are being given free rein to terrorise the Palestinians and absorb the territory into a "Greater Israel."

The bankruptcy of the two-state solution has exposed claims that peace and security for the Palestinians and their liberation from Zionist oppression could be obtained by deals between imperialism and the Arab bourgeois regimes. The interests of Arab and Jewish workers can be secured only by the dissolution of the existing, exclusivist Jewish state and its replacement by a multinational state, with full democratic and social rights for all its inhabitants, as part of a socialist federation of the Middle East.

Álvarez's pro-Israel stance has provoked outrage among the union's rank and file. It forced Álvarez and the UGT leadership to cynically try to pretend that they maintain an equidistant position and that they care about the fate of the Palestinians. Álvarez later met with the Palestinian ambassador to Spain and posted another message: "I reiterated with the Palestinian ambassador UGT's commitment with his people. We cannot tolerate any more victims!"

The UGT bureaucracy, which had not supported any march in support of Palestine in the previous weeks, then hypocritically asked its members to join the October 29 pro-Gaza march in Madrid. The protest, part of mass protests across Spain and Europe, gathered hundreds of thousands across Spain.

The UGT bureaucracy's position reflects the politics of the Spanish social democracy and of the ruling Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos-Sumar government. The UGT bureaucracy had long had an important relationship with the main Israeli union, the Histadrut (General Federation of Land Workers of Israel). The Histadrut was the founder of the Labor Party and the Haganah paramilitary militias, which later became the Israeli army.

The Histadrut has never opposed discrimination against Palestinian workers and has been a pillar of the Israeli apartheid regime, supporting military attacks on Gaza and neighbouring countries.

In 1979, a year after the fall of Spain's fascist Francoist regime, the UGT and Histadrut jointly demanded Spain recognise the state of Israel. In 1986, PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González, a UGT member, recognised Israel, repudiating the previous government's calls to not recognise Israel unless it withdrew from the West Bank and allowed the creation of a Palestinian state.

In 2006, Histadrut Secretary General Amir Peretz became Defense Minister of the Labor Party government. He was responsible for carrying out the brutal war against Lebanon that year that killed 1,300 Lebanese, displaced 1 million and severely damaged Lebanese civil infrastructure. Nonetheless, the UGT bureaucracy and that of the pro-Podemos Workers Commissions (CCOO) continued serving as allies of Histadrut in international organisations such as the International Trade Union Confederation or Public Services International.

The UGT bureaucracy's support for today's genocidal war in Gaza comes after it supported NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine. The CCOO and UGT bureaucracies backed Spanish imperialism and the capitalist PSOE-Podemos government, even calling for workers to carry

out five-minute work stoppages to support the far-right, pro-NATO regime in Ukraine. The PSOE-Podemos government, for its part, sent tanks, anti-aircraft batteries, artillery shells and other ammunition to Ukraine, including to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

Their support for imperialist war abroad went hand in hand with treachery in the class war at home. The UGT and CCOO bureaucracies have acted as tools of the capitalist class, working with the government to impose below-inflation wages and systematically isolate and strangle strikes. They allowed the PSOE and Podemos to send armored vehicles against striking metalworkers, outlaw strikes using draconian minimum services laws, and deploy tens of thousands of police against a three-week nationwide truckers' strike.

Álvarez's support for Israel exposes pseudo-left groups like Spain's Morenoite Revolutionary Workers' Current (CRT), which goes into pro-Gaza protests to promote illusions that workers can pressure the union bureaucracies or parties like Podemos to oppose the Gaza war.

The CRT's Izquierda Diario website admits that Álvarez's support for Israel is "yet another example of how the union bureaucracy operates as agents of the bourgeoisie," but nonetheless concludes, "It is essential that the working class assume the Palestinian cause as its own and demand that the union leaderships, starting with those of the two large federations [UGT and CCOO], organise a large movement against the extermination that is being perpetrated by the Israeli state."

But workers cannot wait for the bureaucracies and the Podemos officials in a capitalist government to completely change their minds and turn to the left, which they will not do. Against war and austerity, the working class must build its own organizations of struggle, the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees. Only this force can break through the resistance of the union leaders and unify workers internationally for a direct assault on the power of the capitalist class and its policies of genocide and war.



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