

Podemos takes its distance from Spanish PSOE-Sumar government to pose as opponent of Gaza genocide

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On December 5, five lawmakers of pseudo-left Podemos announced that they were leaving the Sumar Movement parliamentary group, thereby breaking with Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government. It did so ostensibly in order to oppose the genocide in Gaza, but an overpowering stench of political cynicism surrounds the maneuver.

The Sumar electoral coalition was formed by Spain's deputy prime minister and labour minister, Yolanda Díaz, ahead of last July's snap general election. This effectively displaced Podemos which had nominated Díaz as their de facto leader after Podemos founder Pablo Iglesias resigned and nominated her as his successor.

Frictions between Sumar and Podemos soon erupted. As with prior splits within Podemos, these differences had no principled character. Reflecting the material interests of layers of the affluent middle class within the union bureaucracy and its academic periphery, they reflect divisions over how best to strengthen their weight inside the capitalist state machine while suppressing opposition in the working class.

Before the July 23 elections, Podemos favoured more feminist and critical “left” rhetoric regarding the PSOE in an attempt to shore up its collapsing support after working with the PSOE to impose austerity and back NATO's de facto war on Russia in Ukraine. Sumar instead wanted to forge a new deal with the PSOE by abandoning any radical-sounding slogans and confrontation with the PSOE and focusing on the danger posed by the far-right to justify this course.

Podemos, a much-reduced force, nevertheless readily agreed to run in an electoral coalition with Díaz's platform, led by tested pro-NATO ministers and politicians who had pursued the PSOE-Podemos government's policies of imperialist war on Russia and class war on workers. It even accepted Sumar's demands to remove its leading figures from the electoral lists, such as Irene Montero, then acting Minister of Equality.

For their pains, Díaz treated Podemos like whipped dogs. During the post-election government negotiations between PSOE and Sumar, her platform left Podemos without any representation in the cabinet.

Podemos still chose to remain within the parliamentary group

led by Sumar, hoping to make some pro-forma criticism of the PSOE-Sumar government while still loyally backing it. Despite this, as Podemos sources told *Diario Red*, which is controlled by Iglesias, “the hostility” against Podemos was unending. “They blocked everything we tried to do, from the biggest to the smallest. About one law on wetlands to another in defense of human rights in Senegal.”

“[T]he straw that broke the camel's back,” in words of the same Podemos source, was the genocide in Gaza.

Since October 7, hundreds of thousands have demonstrated across Madrid, Barcelona and other major cities across Spain. They joined millions more throughout the world in powerful displays of international support for the Palestinians. The working class also began to intervene, with 1,200 dockworkers in Barcelona refusing to service any ships carrying war material to Israel and workers at the Navantia shipyard in Ferrol denouncing the PSOE-Sumar government's dispatch of warships in a US-led battle group now patrolling off the Israeli-Gaza coast and demanding their immediate return and an end to all commercial and diplomatic ties with Israel.

Opposition to genocide is developing side by side with strikes against low wages and global cost-of-living crisis, showing the potential for the working class to mount its own, politically independent intervention into the raging crisis of Spanish and world imperialism. Across Spain, tens of thousands of workers in over 30 different sectors are taking action, including an indefinite strike of 55,000 nurses in Catalonia, 9,000 workers from Tecnological consulting company, 3,000 ground service workers for Iberia, and 1,500 workers at Amazon's massive logistics centre in Seville demanding better wages and conditions. Next week, 150,000 hospitality workers in the region of Madrid have been called out on strike.

Podemos drew the conclusion that they faced political oblivion thanks to their association with the PSOE and Sumar, with the vast majority of its supporters joining pro-Palestinian protests and an intensification of the class struggle. The party therefore decided on a parliamentary stunt requesting that its leader Ione Belarra be allowed to speak on behalf of Sumar in a debate on Palestine.

Sumar instead opted for the former UN ambassador Agustín Santos, who said only that the PSOE-Sumar government would recognise a Palestinian state but omitted even a reference to Israel's genocide. Deprived of a platform, the five Podemos lawmakers refused to attend the session.

Podemos spokesperson Javier Sanchez Serna whined, "The result of this veto is that today, the voice [Podemos] that has most forcefully condemned the genocide that Israel is perpetrating in the Gaza Strip has been missing from Congress. The voice that has most specifically demanded that the Prime Minister of the [PSOE-Sumar] Government move from words to actions".

This is ludicrous. The government is only escalating the policies pursued by the previous PSOE-Podemos government over the past four years during which it imposed brutal attacks on the working class: pension cuts consolidating the retirement age to 67, below-inflation wage increases on broad layers of workers, and a labour law reform slashing workers' legal protections in the workplace. To break strikes, it has used draconian minimum services laws on healthcare and airline workers and deployed tens of thousands of police to break metalworkers and truckdrivers strikes. It has also voted the largest military budgets in Spanish history.

Most significantly, under Podemos Spain's trade relations with Israel soared to a record €3.1 billion. Weapons trade also flourished. Between 2020 and 2022, Israel imported €140 million in weaponry, while Spain spent hundreds of millions buying weapons with the "combat-tested" mark from Israel. Their proven use against the Palestinians makes them more valuable and more reliable for Spain's armed forces.

The PSOE-Podemos government also maintained 646 troops in southern Lebanon, as part of the imperialist "peace" mission of the 11,000-strong United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the largest deployment of Spain in a UN mission. Led by Spanish Major General Aroldo Lázaro Sáenz, its aim is to secure Israel's northern border against Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed militia and ally of Hamas in Gaza.

After the October 7 Palestinian uprising, the PSOE-Sumar government in which Podemos sat, proclaimed Israel's "right to self-defence" and sent Spanish frigate *Méndez Núñez* and military supply ship *Patiño* to join the battle group of nuclear-powered, USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier of 4,000 sailors with eight squadrons of aircraft. The carrier is currently deployed in the eastern Mediterranean to provide US support for the Israeli war in Gaza, particularly aimed at Hezbollah.

Madrid has now agreed to join the US-led coalition in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden targeting the Houthi rebels in Yemen and threatening Iran. Spain will do so through EU-led Operation Atalanta, approved in 2008 by the EU Council as a supposed anti-piracy measure but aimed at controlling a maritime route through which the majority of the Asia-Europe trade runs. The mission's headquarters is in Spain's southern city of Rota and it is led by commander Vice Admiral Ignacio

Villanueva. Madrid's frigate *Victoria* is currently off the coasts of Somalia.

This is the real record of Podemos. By sitting inside a government that is abetting Israel's genocide in Gaza, first Podemos and now Sumar have made themselves complicit.

Podemos' cynicism is breathtaking. It is not leaving the PSOE-Sumar government because it opposes its support for Israel and its other signature policies its preparing against the working class—€20 billion in cuts and tax hikes and hiking military spending to record levels. Its only real complaint is that Sumar has closed-down its ability to make occasional critical noises in parliament to conceal its role as a key prop of the PSOE-Sumar government.

Even so Podemos has reassured the PSOE and Sumar of their continued political loyalty. Its spokesperson in parliament Javier Serna told broadcaster Onda Regional that "Sanchez's majority is not at risk". On Wednesday, Podemos called on Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to use the word "genocide" when referring to Israeli attacks on Gaza. Speaking of the "thousands of people being brutally exterminated by the state of Israel," Podemos leader Belarra pathetically stated, "Mr President, I'm asking you to stop the genocide in Gaza. Take concrete actions. You can count on Podemos, on our five seats." She reassured Sánchez of Podemos' loyalty, stating that "the democratic forces [Podemos, PSOE and Sumar] must work together" to stop the far-right in Spain.

For workers to successfully oppose the genocide in Gaza, they must now take up an industrial and political struggle against Israel's partners in crime—above all imperialist governments such as Spain's and their political lackeys, Podemos. This requires above all the building of a new revolutionary leadership, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), the world Trotskyist movement, in Spain and internationally.



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