

# Spain's Podemos politically complicit in the genocide of Palestinians

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Millions of workers and young people are protesting internationally, outraged by the genocide carried out by Israel in Gaza with the aim of ethnically cleansing the Palestinians. Since October 7, thousands of protests have been organized across Spain, including the major cities Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao, Seville, Valencia and Zaragoza, mobilizing millions of workers and youth.

The anti-war spirit of those participating stands in stark contrast to the cynical motivations of their organisers. This is particularly the case with the pseudo-left tendency Podemos, which having left government in December is now posturing as an opponent of genocide after it had armed Israel when it was in power.

There is a class gulf between the struggle waged by the WSWWS to turn the protests to the essential task of building a conscious movement of the working class against the government and the capitalist system—the source of inequality, war and fascism—and cynical political maneuvers of Podemos in parliament and on the streets aimed at keeping mass anger against the Israeli genocide in Gaza trapped within the straitjacket of the PSOE-Sumar government.

## Podemos in power (2020-2023): the flourishing years of Israel-Spanish relations

Today, Podemos actively participates in widespread protests across Spain calling the PSOE-Sumar coalition government to sever all diplomatic and military ties with Israel. However, when it was in a governmental coalition with the PSOE from 2020 to 2023 Spain's political, economic, and military engagements with the far-right Netanyahu government intensified. This occurred despite Netanyahu's brutal suppression of Palestinian rights in the West Bank and Gaza, actions that led to the Hamas October 7 incursion into Israel.

Before 2020, relations between Israel and Spain had deteriorated over Jerusalem's position on the Catalan secessionist crisis in 2017. Israel had defined the crisis in Catalonia as “an internal matter that had to be resolved through dialogue”, angering Madrid which expected full support for its suppression of the Catalan nationalists.

This changed when Podemos came to power.

Trade relations soared to a record €3.1 billion in 2023. In 2022 alone, 2,558 companies exported to Israel, with the value of their goods and services reaching a record €2.1 billion, an increase of 20.2 percent on the previous year, while imports from Israel reached €1 billion.

Some of Spain's largest corporations on the Ibex-35 stock exchange increased their presence in the Israeli market, such as Sacyr, Indra, Acs and Comsa. Podemos never opposed some of the infrastructure companies, such as CAF, COMSA, GMV or TyPSA, working to reinforce Israel's occupation of the West Bank through the expansion of tram

networks connecting occupied Jerusalem with Israel.

Weapons trade also flourished. In 2014, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias criticised the right-wing Popular Party (PP) government for its weapons deals with Israel. Iglesias said it was “a shame that our government is going to continue spending €300 million buying Spike missiles from Israel and that during 2013 sold military material to Israel worth four million euros.”

Six years later, however, the PP's weapons deal with the Zionist regime paled in comparison with that of Podemos. Under Vice President Iglesias, between 2020 and 2022, Spain sold weapons to Israel worth €140 million, while Madrid spent hundreds of millions buying weapons with the “combat-tested” mark from Israel. Their use against the Palestinians made them seen as more valuable and more reliable for Spain's armed forces.

The PSOE-Podemos government also bought Spike missiles worth €365 million. On October 3, just days before the Israeli assault on Gaza, the government bought another 1,680 Spike missiles worth €285 million.

Diplomatic relations also improved. In June 2023, Madrid hosted the “Fifth Spain-Israel Strategic Dialogue”, gathering senior officials from both countries including from defence ministries and armies. The conference discussed the “scope for Israel to help meet the growing demand from Spain and its EU partners for civil and military technology.”

The Podemos government also maintained 646 troops in southern Lebanon, as part of the imperialist 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.

On the eve of the October 7 uprising, Podemos and its newly formed coalition, the Sumar electoral platform—which included the Sumar Movement, Podemos, the Stalinist United Left, as well as various nationalist and regionalist factions, all led by tested, pro-NATO politicians—had already signaled their support for Israel's oppression against Palestinians.

## Podemos' forty-five days in government after October 7

Podemos played an extraordinary cynical role. While accusing Israel of genocide, the PSOE-Podemos government continued selling millions of euros of weaponry to be used on Gazans.

Just a week after October 7, as Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of the PSOE condemned the Hamas attack and reiterated Israel's country's “right to defend” itself, Podemos leader and Minister for Social Rights Ione Belarra accused Israel of carrying out a “planned genocide” in Gaza.

Belarra accused Israel of “leaving hundreds of thousands of people

without electricity, food and water” and bombing the civilian population “as a collective punishment”. She was playing a duplicitous role. According to research by the Delàs Center for Peace, after October 7, the PSOE-Podemos government continued buying and selling weapons to Israel and closing contracts with Israeli arms companies.

Last November, as Belarra sat in government, a Spanish arms company exported lethal ammunition to Israel authorised by the PSOE-Podemos government worth €987,000 belonging to the category “bombs, grenades, torpedoes, mines, missiles, cartridges and other ammunition and projectiles”. These operations were continued by its successor, the PSOE-Sumar government.

Imports also rose. Spain acquired €705 million worth of products from the Israeli company Elbit Systems, specialising in manufacturing military electronics and intelligence gathering systems and different types of vehicles such as submarines, aircraft and combat ships.

The PSOE-Podemos government also protected Israel’s rear, as Podemos ministers voted to send Spanish frigate *Méndez Núñez* and military supply ship *Patiño* to join the battle group of the USS Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier. The carrier was deployed in the eastern Mediterranean to provide US support for the Israeli war in Gaza, backing up US threats to bomb forces in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq or Iran that might seek to intervene militarily to assist the Palestinians.

The turning point that compelled Podemos to shift its stance came with the global outcry against the Israeli atrocities. The largest and most sustained anti-war movement since the Vietnam War era erupted across the world, with millions participating in protests. In Belgium, airport unions called on workers not to handle arms shipments to Israel. In Barcelona, 1,200 dockworkers announced they would refuse to service any ships carrying material to supply the Netanyahu government’s war. In Ferrol, workers at public shipyard company Navantia denounced the dispatching of Spanish warships and demanded their immediate return and an end to all commercial and diplomatic ties with Israel. ?

Understanding that they faced political oblivion due to their association with the genocide, with the vast majority of its supporters joining pro-Palestinian protests and the first signs of the intervention of the working class internationally, Podemos decided to leave the PSOE-Sumar government. On December 5, five lawmakers of Podemos announced that they were leaving the Sumar Movement parliamentary group.

Podemos left government not because it opposes the genocide in Gaza, its austerity policies and its militarism, all of which it supported from 2020 to 2023. It even made clear that it was not going to use its key five lawmakers to bring down the government, which enjoys a thin majority. On the contrary, Belarra cynically stated that “the democratic forces [Podemos, PSOE and Sumar] must work together” to stop the far-right in Spain.

## **Podemos postures against genocide**

Podemos was in short working with the PSOE-Sumar government to keep mass anger against the Israeli genocide in Gaza confined in the straitjacket of the PSOE-Sumar government by citing the far-right threat.

Typically, in early January, Belarra stated that Podemos had urged the Spanish government to support South Africa’s case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Israel for genocide. Podemos sent official letters to the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the central government.

The ICJ interim ruling found that there was compelling evidence of both genocidal acts and genocidal intent on the part of Israeli government and military leaders and that the case should go forward. However, ceding to

pressure from major imperialist powers, including the US, UK, France, Germany and others, the court scandalously failed to call on Israel to end its bombardment of Gaza and lift its blockade of food, medicine, energy and other essentials.

The ruling exposed Podemos insistence that protestors should put their hopes in the ICJ that could not and will not stop the genocide.

Podemos is also attempting to divert the protests away from the Spanish government and the imperialist bourgeoisie it serves utilizing a shop-soiled Stalinist anti-Americanism. On X, Podemos leader Belarra said, “This government’s subservience to the US is what prevents it from acting against the genocide of the Palestinian people. I’m ashamed.”

This is despite the fact that as a minister she voted in favour of increasing the number of US warships and soldiers stationed on Spanish territory and Spanish soil and joined in sending tanks and weaponry to the US-NATO proxy Kiev regime in the Ukraine to wage war on Russia.

Behind Belarra’s anti-Americanism is not socialist opposition to US imperialism. Rather, under conditions where US power is diminishing and voices within sections of the European elite are calling for “strategic autonomy” from Washington, particularly in case Trump wins the elections this year, Podemos is consciously bolstering European and especially Spanish imperialism.

At the same time, by not mentioning the mass protests that have erupted in the US, particularly among Jewish people, Podemos is showing it is hostile to any perspective of international unity of workers across the Atlantic in opposition to the genocide in Gaza.

Podemos also promotes illusions that the PSOE-Sumar government, still involved in selling and importing weapons to and from Israel, can be pressured to act against its campaign of mass murder and ethnic cleansing.

In late February, Podemos submitted a non-legal proposal in parliament to cut diplomatic relations and military ties with Israel, “until the offensive on Gaza and the West Bank ceases”. Of the six initiatives put to a vote, only “doubling efforts to ensure the inflow of humanitarian aid to Gaza and the increase of aid and the sending of jointly coordinated aid within the EU” was adopted.

Cynically, on the call for an immediate cessation of arms trade with Israel, the two government parties, the PSOE and Sumar, voted in favour, but this was rejected by 176 votes to 166, with the opposition right-wing People’s Party (PP), the far-right Vox, and the Catalan nationalist Together for Catalonia (Junts) party, which support the government from outside.

For all their posturing, Podemos is still trying to shore up the government. It does not oppose Spanish militarism and when in power agreed to record hikes in military spending. They also supported the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, sending millions of euros in weaponry, training and aid to the far-right Zelensky regime.

Podemos’ war abroad is bound up with its now well-established record of suppressing workers in Spain, including sending thousands of police to crush the Cádiz metalworkers, the 2022 truckers’ strike, and imposition of draconian minimum services to break strikes.

Above all, Podemos is opposed to the only way of stopping the mass murder and ethnic cleansing in Gaza: the development of a global movement of the working class against the capitalist class and its repressive state apparatus.

Any genuine fight against genocide and war requires the independent mobilization of the working class on an international and socialist basis, in opposition to political forces like PSOE, Sumar and Podemos and its trade union allies, CCOO and UGT, which acts as a police force on behalf of imperialism. This requires new organisations, a new perspective and the building of a political leadership aiming for the conquest of power by the working class, the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, and the establishment of socialism on a world scale. It means building a Spanish section of the International Committee of the Fourth International, the

world Trotskyist movement.



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