

Spanish union bureaucracies endorse EU militarization plans

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The bureaucracies of the General Union of Workers (UGT) and Workers' Commissions (CCOO), Spain's two largest trade union federations, have thrown their full support behind the European Union's (EU) plans for mass rearmament, aligning themselves with the ruling class's preparations for war. Their support for the EU's war drive constitutes a wholesale betrayal of the working class and a damning exposure of their role as enforcers of capitalist rule.

Fearing that Donald Trump will sideline their imperialist ambitions, the European powers have responded by plunging headlong into a rearmament frenzy. Trump's promises to renegotiate with Russia and his deal for US access to Ukraine's vast mineral wealth threaten to upend the division of spoils painstakingly pursued by the EU since the onset of the NATO-instigated war. Determined not to be left behind in the global scramble for influence and resources, France, Germany and the United Kingdom are dramatically ramping up military expenditure.

The European Union has unveiled a sweeping plan to mobilise €800 billion in public and private funds for armaments, marking the largest rearmament drive on the continent since the Second World War. This militarisation campaign is fuelling an arms race, deepening the global war crisis and laying the foundations for catastrophic conflicts between the imperialist powers that twice plunged the world into catastrophe.

The Spanish government is no exception to this arms race and will bring forward the target of allocating 2 percent of GDP to military spending, originally set for 2029, to this very year. With a €10.471 billion increase in the defence budget, plus an additional €3.593 billion approved by the government since January 2025, the total reaches €33.123 billion, already meeting that goal.

All signs suggest this military spending will continue to grow in the coming years.

The two ruling partners, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and its pseudo-left ally Sumar, are well aware of the widespread opposition among the Spanish population to increasing military spending and the accompanying social cuts. To contain this opposition and prevent any mass movement against militarism, the government and Spanish imperialists rely heavily on the support of their allies in the trade union bureaucracy.

On May Day, union leaders intervened to justify militarism and military spending to workers. Pepe Álvarez, Secretary General of the PSOE-aligned UGT, invoked the concept of strategic autonomy, stating that defence policy must also be autonomous. "We have seen that it is not only about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, but also about military industry production, where we have an absolutely foolish and inconsistent dependence on the US."

Álvarez reveals the pro-imperialist position of the UGT, which under the concept of autonomy defends the creation of a new European imperialist bloc opposed to the United States. This only serves the militarist interests of European capitalists and fractures the working class along national lines, facilitating its exploitation and repression.

To better sell militarism to workers, Álvarez seeks to give strategic autonomy a social content, arguing that the dependence on US arms is a threat and that Europe must produce its own weapons, which "also means job creation. Not only in the direct manufacture of military products, but also from the perspective of research and development." To pay for those weapons, Álvarez believes "the EU should impose a tax on all citizens for defence."

Even if it were true that an increase in arms

production, a sector with high technological requirements and low labour intensity, could have a noticeable impact on job creation, what Álvarez is advocating is both despicable and criminal.

If in the last century, Keynes proposed digging holes to fill them again in order to create jobs, now Álvarez and those who echo his arguments propose digging holes to fill them with corpses! Moreover, to create a few jobs, Álvarez not only wants workers to die in war but also to pay for it with their taxes.

Unai Sordo, the Secretary General of CCOO, a union aligned with the pseudo-left parties Sumar and Podemos, tried to project some opposition in his May Day speech by criticising European security policy, while still accepting that Europe has a security problem. “It does and it must equip itself with critical infrastructure that is protected: energy infrastructure, supply chains, defence against cyberattacks...”

For Sordo, before starting to spend on weapons, “the European Union should first define a comprehensive security policy and from there adopt the necessary budgetary measures.” According to him, not doing so would be a mistake of perspective “and it would be an enormous mistake if it comes at the expense of strengthening European capacities linked to what we call strategic autonomy.”

In reality, Sordo is merely trying to conceal his and his union’s support for militarism by introducing some formal distinctions, while ultimately backing the creation of a European imperialist bloc and the commitment to rearmament and war.

The pro-war stance of the unions is not new. The rearmament policy began years ago. Between 2020 and 2023, under the government of PSOE and Podemos (from which Sumar later split), the Defence Ministry’s budget increased from 1 percent of GDP (€10.2 billion) to 1.3 percent (€19.7 billion). In 2023 alone, €7.7 billion were spent on weapons acquisition and development, a 69 percent increase over 2022.

During those years, the unions raised no opposition to this increase in military spending. Not a strike, not a protest, not even a complaint. On the contrary, they collaborated actively with that government in stripping workers of rights through reactionary reforms such as labour and pension reforms, and in suppressing strikes and mobilisations that sought wage increases above inflation or resisted the progressive dismantling of

essential public services like healthcare and education.

When the war in Ukraine broke out, both CCOO and UGT uncritically echoed European Union and NATO propaganda, concealing the role that European and US imperialism played in encircling Russia in order to provoke its reactionary invasion of Ukraine. They also made no mention of the promotion of Ukrainian far right forces by imperialism, nor of the detention and repression suffered by left wing activists in Ukraine.

The pro imperialist role of the unions was also evident in relation to the genocide in Gaza. When the Israeli offensive against Gazans began, Pepe Álvarez had no problem attending pro Israel rallies outside the Israeli Embassy convened by pro Zionist groups, and meeting with the Israeli ambassador. In fact, the UGT has historically been linked to the corporatist Israeli union Histadrut (General Federation of Labourers of the Land of Israel), a pillar of the Israeli apartheid regime.

Neither CCOO nor UGT has called for a strike or boycott of companies collaborating with Israel, nor have they called on their members to halt activity at Spanish ports, which—with the approval of PSOE and Sumar—continue to be used to transport weapons to Israel.

Just like the pseudo-left parties Sumar and Podemos, the union bureaucracies are nothing more than instruments of imperialism and capitalism embedded within the working class. Their role is to contain any protest against imperialism, prevent workers’ unity across national borders and help the government impose austerity and social cuts.

The fight against militarism, austerity and war depends on building rank-and-file organizations of struggle in the working class, in Spain and internationally, to oppose the suffocation of the class struggle by the union bureaucracies, and wage a struggle for socialism and workers power against pseudo-left parties of capitalist rule such as Sumar and Podemos.



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