

Mass pro-Gaza protest blocks final stage of Spanish Vuelta cycling race

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The unprecedented cancellation of the final stage of Spain's Vuelta a España on Sunday has reverberated internationally, underscoring mass opposition to the genocide in Gaza. One of cycling's three "Grand Tours" alongside the Tour de France and the Giro d'Italia, La Vuelta is a 3,100-kilometer (1,926-mile) race, watched by millions.

On Sunday afternoon, the final stage was cancelled as over 100,000 protesters took to the streets in Madrid; thousands flooded the cyclists' path as they entered Madrid for the final stretch of the race. Protesters knocked down barriers and marched through the course with banners reading "Boycott Israel Genocide No," chanting "Boycott, boycott, boycott Israel," "Free Palestine," and "total embargo." Police sprayed tear gas and charged the crowd.

The Socialist Party (PSOE)–Sumar coalition government, working with the right-wing Popular Party (PP) regional administration in Madrid, had mobilised over 2,000 police and emergency personnel for the event. The Civil Guard deployed 130 officers, nearly 100 vehicles and a helicopter, backed by a special force of over 400 agents. The National Police alone assigned 1,100 officers—the largest operation since the 2022 NATO summit in Madrid—including police dogs, drones and helicopters. Reinforcements were brought from nearby cities.

Demonstrators targeted the race because of the participation of the Israel–Premier Tech cycling team, owned by Israeli-Canadian billionaire Sylvan Adams, a vocal supporter of the Zionist state and personal friend of genocidal Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The hypocrisy of the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI), cycling's world governing body, was glaring. It expelled Russian and Belarusian teams a month after the Ukraine war began. Riders from these countries can only compete individually, outside their national federations, stripped of

their flags. Yet UCI let Israel-Premier Tech participate.

For weeks, demonstrators had interrupted stages of La Vuelta demanding Israel's expulsion, but on Sunday, thousands pulled down police barricades and forced the suspension of the Vuelta. The traditional sprint finish and podium ceremony were abandoned, as organisers fled the stage and riot police tried to disperse protesters with tear gas, stun grenades, and baton charges.

While the protests were formally called by the Pabloite Anticapitalistas party and the Solidarity Network Against the Occupation of Palestine (Rescop), which includes BDS, the scale of Sunday's mobilisation stunned and swamped the organizers.

Raúl Camargo, spokesperson for Anticapitalistas, admitted to France24: "We knew that actions like this would take place because there are many people working in small groups, but it was not an action organised by those of us who have been involved in the protests from the beginning." Víctor de la Fuente of Anticapitalistas admitted to *El País* that while their goal had been to "achieve a massive mobilisation," they only expected isolated "disruptive acts" by individuals.

Both Anticapitalistas and Rescop admitted that the decisive roadblock which compelled the suspension of the Vuelta was a "spontaneous" and "self-organised" eruption, not the product of their planning. Camargo explained that Rescop's role was limited to calling a meeting, agreeing on slogans and meeting points, and circulating a poster on social media and WhatsApp. "That way thousands and thousands of people were called," he admitted. The work of mobilization, he said, was "very easy, because there is a lot of support right now in the Spanish state for demands of solidarity with Palestine."

The 100,000 people who took to the streets, according to official figures, streamed in not only from designated assembly points at Atocha, Cibeles and the Ermita de San Antonio de la Florida, but also from dozens of other

locations, many of them improvised. Neighbourhood groups organised autonomously, coordinated via WhatsApp groups. Héctor Grad of Rescop said that “afterwards other collectives joined on their own, teachers, artists,” until “in the end there were more than 12 points where people were gathering, some unexpected.”

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez cynically attempted to posture as sympathetic to the protests, though his government had coordinated with the Madrid regional government to crush them. He said, “Spain today shines as an example and as a source of pride, an example to an international community where it sees Spain taking a step forward in the defence of human rights.” Yesterday, Sánchez demanded that Israel be excluded from international sports competitions.

This cynical rhetoric seeks to align the government with the immense popular anger at Israel’s genocide and at the complicity of Washington, London, Berlin and Paris. In reality, the PSOE–Sumar government pursued the same duplicitous manoeuvres as the other NATO powers.

In early September, Sánchez announced various measures after nearly two years of genocide, including a “legal and permanent prohibition on buying and selling weapons, ammunition, and military equipment” to Israel. Even this declaration was riddled with loopholes. It did not specify whether it covered dual-use products and technologies, or the spare parts required to maintain Israeli military equipment already in use by the Spanish armed forces. Nor did it address the more than 40 contracts awarded to Israeli arms companies and their subsidiaries.

The PSOE–Sumar government was further exposed in July, when Eldiario.es revealed that from February and May 2025 it increased its imports of “arms and munitions” from Israel, making it the EU’s leading importer of Israeli weaponry. The Centre Delàs confirmed that, despite official claims of an embargo, Spanish exports of military equipment to Israel continued in both 2024 and 2025. Moreover, Spanish ports such as Algeciras and the US bases at Rota and Morón In Spain continue to facilitate Washington’s resupply and intelligence operations for Israel’s war machine.

On trade, the government agreed to bar imports from illegal settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, but not their transit, while maintaining normal relations with Israeli firms complicit in the occupation.

The mass protest in Madrid confirms the overwhelming and explosive popular opposition in Spain and across

Europe to the Gaza genocide and NATO imperialist governments complicit in it.

Anticapitalistas presented Sunday’s action as a vindication of their perspective of pressuring imperialist governments to break relations with Israel, declaring: “It shows it is possible to force our governments to completely sever relations with Israel.”

Lucía Nistal, of the Morenoite Workers Revolutionary Current, echoed this sentiment: “They have sent more than 2,300 police against us, they have tried to repress us, they have tried to criminalise us for refusing to be complicit in the whitewashing of Zionism into which they wanted to turn the cycling tour. But today we have stopped the tour. Now it is time to stop everything. Long live Free Palestine!”

This is a dead end for mounting working class anger, in Spain and internationally, against the Gaza genocide. The NATO imperialist powers, including the PSOE–Sumar government, cannot be pressured into halting a genocide they are directly sponsoring and arming. It can be safely predicted that they will continue to arm Israel for the genocide even after the Madrid protest.

What is required is the independent, international mobilisation of the working class—in Spain, across Europe, the Middle East and internationally—to block the military resupply of Israel. Workers and youth must reject the fraudulent politics of moral appeals to the PSOE–Sumar government, and build their own rank-and-file organizations, totally independently of the union bureaucracies, establishment parties, and their middle-class political satellites on the perspective of a struggle for socialism. This is the only way to organize a struggle that can genuinely halt the slaughter in Gaza and escalating war in the Middle East.



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