

Spanish trade unions subordinate anti-war opposition to Sanchez's Socialist Party government

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The war launched by US imperialism and Israel against Iran is dragging the world into a broader conflict in the Middle East and brings closer the prospect of a new world war.

In Spain, the government of Pedro Sánchez—formed by the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the pseudo-left Sumar party—is posturing as a moderate voice opposed to escalation, calling for “no to war” and saying it will not allow Washington to use the joint US-Spanish military bases at Rota and Morón.

This stance is a fraud. Even as Sánchez issued these declarations, his government dispatched its most technologically advanced frigate, Cristóbal Colón, to the eastern Mediterranean to “offer protection and aerial defence.”

Equipped with advanced missile defence systems capable of intercepting retaliatory Iranian drone and cruise missile strikes against US and British bases or Israel, the deployment supports the US-led war effort by shielding key Western military infrastructure and enabling Washington to intensify its bombing campaign against Iran. The PSOE-Sumar government remains fully integrated into NATO's military operations and continues to increase Spain's defence spending and back the European Union's accelerating rearmament drive.

The zigzags of the PSOE-Sumar government reflect the imperialist interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie. On the one hand, Spain does not feel itself or its European allies militarily strong enough to risk an open clash with Washington and seeks to accommodate US policy. On the other, it both recognizes Trump's anti-European agenda and fears the deep-seated opposition in the working class to imperialist war.

It is in this context that the country's main trade union federations, Workers' Commissions (Comisiones Obreras – CCOO), close to the pseudo-left Podemos and Sumar, and the General Union of Workers (Unión General de Trabajadores – UGT), aligned with the PSOE, are seeking to subordinate anti-war sentiment among workers and youth to the government and the broader strategic aims of European imperialism.

The unions have co-signed manifestos with Sumar, including one titled, “Peace and Democracy for Iran.” In it, they call on the Spanish government to “maintain a firm and consistent position in favour of peace and an immediate ceasefire,” while

welcoming measures such as “the prohibition of the use of US bases in Spain to support this war.”

The statement urges “that the European Union adopt a clear and unified stance in defence of the cessation of hostilities, the protection of the civilian population and the strict respect for international law,” and concludes by demanding “that the European Union adopt an unequivocal position in favour of peace, rejecting military escalation and promoting diplomatic mediation.”

In reality, the imperialist powers within the European Union have backed and participated in US-led wars across the Middle East and Central Asia, from Afghanistan and Iraq, and Libya to Syria and Yemen, and most recently the Israeli genocide in Gaza. While occasionally posturing as advocates of diplomacy or “multilateralism,” the European governments have in practice supported the imperialist restructuring of the region led by Washington.

At the same time, these governments have waged an unrelenting social war against their own populations to finance militarism. For more than a decade, especially since NATO provoked the war on Russia in Ukraine in 2022, Europe's ruling classes have imposed austerity, slashed social spending, and diverted vast resources into rearmament.

This also applies to the Spanish government. Former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg recently pushed back against Donald Trump's rants that Spain underspends on defence, noting that “the government of Pedro Sánchez is increasing its defence spending.” Spain's actual military expenditure is estimated at around €66 billion, compared to roughly €30 billion in 2018, Sánchez's first year in office. This 123 percent increase has been facilitated by the backing of its pseudo-left coalition partners—first Podemos (2020–2023) and now Sumar.

The trade union bureaucracy has played a decisive role. The UGT and CCOO are active defenders of the Spanish and European rearmament drive under the banner of “strategic autonomy”—the construction of military forces aimed at sustaining the war against Russia and enabling interventions across the Middle East and Africa, independently of

Washington. This entails the transfer of vast resources from social spending to military budgets, the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs amid an escalating global trade war, and the reintroduction of conscription.

Last year, Unai Sordo, general secretary of CCOO, defended increasing military spending considering an “unprecedented situation” due to the US trade war threats. He insisted that CCOO’s approach will “try to ensure that the position of European trade unionism” advocates for “increasing the strategic autonomy of the European Union.” This, he said, must go beyond defence and security and also encompass the energy and industrial sectors.

Weeks later, general secretary of the UGT, Pepe Álvarez, told Público on May Day, “Europe, above all, must have strategic autonomy... That autonomy must exist in taxation and in pharmaceutical [but] also apply to defence policy.

We’ve seen that it’s not only about Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, but also about the production of military industry, where we have an absolutely absurd and inconsistent dependence on the United States.” He then went on to urge, “The EU should impose a tax on all citizens for defence [spending].”

The unions have dressed their pro-militarism by claiming that, in the words of UGT’s Álvarez, defence spending “also means the creation of jobs. Not only directly in the manufacture of military products but also from the perspective of research and development.” Last month, CCOO even warned that any legal or political blockage of government military modernisation programmes could endanger “10,000 jobs.”

This is a criminal policy, which rests on the premise that the production of weapons designed to kill workers and civilians in other countries is a legitimate foundation for jobs at home. It subordinates workers to the economic and strategic demands of their own ruling class.

UGT and CCOO even dress militarism as producing social wellbeing. In 2022, UGT FICA posted an article, “The defence industry, a driver of economic growth and social wellbeing.” In it, the UGT said, “We clearly support a substantial increase in our country’s defence industry,” adding, “we are very clear that the defence industry is a driver of economic growth and social wellbeing.” The union explicitly rejected any conflict between military expenditure and social spending, saying, “More education, more public healthcare, decent pensions, more infrastructure and more social housing should not be the opposite of increasing the defence budget.”

When the PSOE-Sumar government presented the deeply unpopular Plan Industrial y Tecnológico de la Seguridad y la Defensa (PITSD) in April 2025, which gave another €10 billion to defence, the trade union bureaucracy moved swiftly to align itself with Madrid. The UGT in Cádiz actively lobbied for a share of the new defence spending, pressing for the F-100 frigate modernisation programme to be awarded to local shipyards.

Similarly, CCOO called for multi-year acquisition planning, a state pact to guarantee long-term military procurement, and predictable investment streams to secure defence contracts and “allow companies to guarantee long-term investments. All of this must be included in the European Defense Plan.”

Both unions have now been formally integrated into the military-industrial state machinery. A 2025 executive order created a National Committee for Security and Technological Sovereignty tied to the national security and defence industrial plan, with UGT and CCOO sitting on its advisory council alongside business organisations and the arms industry association, TEDAE.

CCOO and UGT function as corporatist agencies of the capitalist state, working with the PSOE-Sumar government ministries, the arms industry, and the military apparatus to promote rearmament while suppressing opposition from below. They offer no path forward for the growing opposition among workers and youth to austerity, war, and dictatorship. Their role is to contain and divert social anger into harmless appeals to the very institutions responsible for the war drive.

The struggle against imperialist war requires a conscious break with these organisations. Workers and youth must build rank-and-file committees in workplaces, factories, ports, transport hubs, schools, and universities, independent of the union bureaucracy and the parties of the political establishment, including PSOE, Sumar, and Podemos.

These committees must unite workers across sectors and countries, in a common struggle to oppose rearmament and austerity and to take action to paralyse the war effort. Only through the independent mobilisation of the working class on an international socialist programme can the drive toward imperialist war be halted.



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