

Spain's Workers' Revolutionary Current channels anti-war sentiment behind social democrats, pseudo-left parties and union bureaucracy

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The Workers' Revolutionary Current (Corriente Revolucionaria de Trabajadores—CRT), the Spanish affiliate of the Morenoite Permanent Revolution Current—Fourth International (PRC-FI), is calling for a “united front” with the trade union bureaucracy to put pressure on the Socialist Party (PSOE)—Sumar government to oppose imperialist war. This is a political mechanism for subordinating the working class to the very forces responsible for militarism, war and austerity.

It is being advanced under conditions of determined mass popular opposition to imperialist war. Across the globe, millions have taken to the streets in protest against the genocide in Gaza, expressing deep hostility to the crimes of the imperialist powers and their allies. In the US, this opposition has found expression in the “No Kings” demonstrations. The third round of protests last weekend drew an estimated 8 million, making it the largest single day of protest in American history. Demonstrations have been held internationally, involving workers, youth and students outraged by the ongoing slaughter in Gaza and the complicity of their own governments in the US-Israeli war against Iran.

Mass opposition is developing alongside a deepening global economic crisis. Workers in every country are confronting soaring inflation, rising costs of living, energy shortages and attacks on wages and social conditions. This is laying the objective basis for escalating class struggle.

It is under these conditions that middle-class organisations such as the CRT advance the “unity of left” with the trade union bureaucracy, seeking to contain and divert this emerging movement and prevent it from breaking with the parties of the capitalist state through the adoption of an independent socialist political perspective and leadership.

In a statement issued shortly after the outbreak of the war, “Trump threatens a trade blockade against the Spanish state if it is prevented from using the Rota and Morón bases to attack Iran. Close the bases NOW!”, the CRT appealed to an ill-defined “left” and to the trade union bureaucracies—the Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT)—to organise protests. These mobilisations are intended to pressure the PSOE—Sumar government to shut down the joint US—Spanish military bases at Morón and Rota, and to end arms trade with Washington and Israel. The CRT declared:

It is necessary for the trade union, political and social organisations of the left—those of us who have been part of the protests against the genocide and the latest imperialist aggressions—as well as all working-class organisations, beginning with the major unions, to promote protests that turn the streets, workplaces and places of study into trenches to stop this

aggression and the escalation of war. CCOO and the UGT must break with their passivity and call for mobilisation against this imperialist offensive.

In a more recent article under the title “Sánchez's ‘social shield’ in the face of the war in Iran: tax cuts with no curb on prices, layoffs, or military spending”, the CRT criticises the PSOE—Sumar government's limited fiscal measures and subsidies that fail to address the economic fallout of the war. Once again, it appeals to the trade unions, insisting:

We must demand that the trade union leaderships unite our struggles with the fight against rearmament and its imperialist wars. We need to bring into this struggle the strength of the trade unions, the student movement, and social movements.

The CRT's attempt to present the CCOO and UGT as instruments of peace and even anti-imperialist struggle is ludicrous. For decades, they have functioned as steadfast defenders of the war policies of PSOE governments, including in coalition with Podemos and Sumar. They have backed rearmament programmes and rising military expenditure, justifying them as engines of employment, while promoting the expansion of arms production and even advocating new taxes to finance European rearmament.

They have played a direct role in suppressing working-class resistance in key sectors of the war economy, from Airbus, where they signed agreements involving mass layoffs and shut-down strikes, to the metal and shipbuilding industries linked to military production, while championing “competitiveness” and sustained investment in major defence firms.

Both unions are formally embedded within the military-industrial apparatus of the state. A 2025 executive order established a National Committee for Security and Technological Sovereignty, tied to the national security and defence industrial plan, on whose advisory council the UGT and CCOO sit alongside business organisations and the arms industry association, TEDAE. Through this direct incorporation into the structures of state policy, the unions function as active components of the rearmament programme.

The political fraud of the CRT's perspective is further exposed by its claim that the unions have “even gone so far as to put forward the tool of the general strike as a means to try to stop everything against imperialist war with the strength of the working class, as in two general strikes in

Italy and various days of struggle.”

Such examples prove precisely the opposite of what the CRT writes. The strikes in Italy, as well as protests in Greece against the Gaza genocide or actions by port workers in Barcelona refusing to handle arms shipments to Israel, were not the product of initiatives by the main union leaderships. Nor did they amount to a sustained effort to disrupt the war machine.

On the contrary, these actions emerged in opposition to, or independently of, the official apparatuses and remained strictly limited in scope. Their significance lies not in demonstrating the potential for the union bureaucracy to oppose war, but underscoring the necessity for an organised and politically conscious rebellion against them and the building of new organisations of struggle.

This is not a new orientation for the CRT. During the mass international protests against the Gaza genocide, the CRT advanced the same perspective, calling for a “united front” with the leaderships of CCOO and UGT, which continued to support the PSOE–Sumar government even as it armed Israel and backed NATO’s wars.

A class struggle against imperialist war can be waged only in opposition to the apparatus of the trade unions, which are integrated into the state and the major corporations. This requires the building of rank-and-file committees in workplaces, factories, ports and transport hubs, to mobilise the collective strength of the working class against a ruling class waging war abroad while carrying out a relentless offensive against living standards and democratic rights at home.

The lessons of the 2002-2003 protests

The CRT advances as its historical model for opposing imperialist war: the mass protests against the US-led Iraq War in 2002–2003, in which millions of workers and youth across Spain and internationally participated.

“That movement,” the CRT states, “expressed a profound rejection of the Spanish state’s participation in an invasion based on lies and aimed at securing strategic and energy interests, aligning itself with Blair and Bush,” before concluding: “Today we need to recover that spirit.”

Despite their enormous scale, these mobilisations were rapidly demobilised once the US launched the war. They failed to prevent Spain from supporting the invasion, which would go on to claim the lives of over a million people. Responsibility for this outcome lay precisely with the pro-imperialist forces that the CRT now seeks to pressure into adopting an anti-war stance through the trade union bureaucracy: the PSOE and the Stalinist-led United Left (IU), now integrated into the governing Sumar coalition.

While millions took to the streets against the right-wing Popular Party government of Jose Maria Aznar for supporting the war, the CCOO and UGT confined them to controlled protests and institutional appeals, opposing any action that could disrupt production or directly challenge Aznar, and rejecting the development of an independent, international movement of the working class against imperialism.

The PSOE and IU worked systematically to channel the mass anti-war movement into a safe electoral project for the bourgeoisie. This culminated in the PSOE’s victory in the 2004 elections, after which the new government withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq. This tactical manoeuvre served to defuse mass anger, while the PSOE soon intensified its broader military interventions abroad.

In office, the PSOE governments of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero (2004–2011) deepened Spain’s integration into imperialist operations. They expanded the military deployment in Afghanistan, sent troops to

Lebanon following Israel’s 2006–2007 assault on Hezbollah, and participated in NATO’s war on Libya, which left tens of thousands dead. The Libyan intervention was overseen on the Spanish side by Julio Rodríguez Fernández, who later joined the leadership of Podemos, underscoring the continuity between the PSOE, the military establishment, and the new “left populists” of Podemos, founded in 2014.

This was part of a broader international pattern. Globally coordinated protests involving millions failed to stop the war, not because of a lack of opposition but because that opposition was politically subordinated to sections of the ruling class. In the US, pseudo-left organisations and liberal forces channelled mass anti-war sentiment behind the Democratic Party and the election campaigns of Barack Obama, contributing directly to the dissipation of the anti-war movement.

In Britain, the Stop the War Coalition served a similar function, providing the political platform for Jeremy Corbyn, who worked to contain mass opposition within the framework of the Labour Party, the very party that had spearheaded the invasion of Iraq under Tony Blair. This perspective channelled widespread anger back into a party of British imperialism, leading it into a political dead end.

The social democratic PSOE has functioned as the principal party of the banks, corporations and militarist interests since the end of the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. During its long tenure in power from 1982 to 1996, the PSOE secured Spain’s entry into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), consolidated its integration into the European Union, and later oversaw the adoption of the euro.

During the 1990s, PSOE-led governments were active participants in US-led wars in the Middle East and the Balkans. Spain supported the Gulf War against Iraq in 1991, deploying naval forces to the Persian Gulf. Spanish troops were subsequently sent to the Balkans during the wars that followed the US-German-instigated breakup of Yugoslavia, and by the end of the decade Spain was directly involved in NATO’s bombing campaign during the Kosovo War.

These were always presented as humanitarian interventions in an effort to stem opposition and politically rehabilitate the Spanish military: an institution deeply despised by the working class for its role in more than a century of coups and counterrevolution, most infamously in the 1936 coup led by Franco that sparked the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and ushered in a four-decade military-fascist dictatorship.

Podemos and Sumar: the “neo-reformists” without reforms

In its article, “Sánchez’s ‘social shield’ in the face of the war in Iran: tax cuts with no curb on prices, layoffs, or military spending”, the CRT acknowledges the fundamentally anti-working-class character of the PSOE–Sumar government, writing:

What we see once again is the continuity of the policies of these “progressive” governments—whether with Sumar or previously with Unidas Podemos—which for years have failed to propose even the most minimal structural reform in relation to housing, taxation, or the energy question. Instead, what we see are stopgap measures designed to guarantee the multimillion profits of large corporations and rentiers, while it is the working class and the broader popular layers who bear the consequences.

It is not compatible to guarantee corporate profits and increase military spending by billions, while at the same time trying to sell us a supposed “social shield” that does not improve social conditions or public services, and instead leaves space for the

demagogy of the far right to capitalise on popular discontent.

This only exposes the perspective at the heart of the CRT. While it routinely describes Podemos and Sumar as “neo-reformist,” it is compelled to admit that these parties do not carry out even minimal reforms. They defend the interests of capitalism, of the bourgeoisie, and an affluent upper-middle class which directly benefits from the exploitation of the working class.

Both have backed record increases in military spending, the shipment of weapons to the far-right Ukrainian regime in NATO’s war against Russia, and the continuation of arms trade with Israel in alignment with NATO’s geopolitical strategy.

At home, these parties have been no less hostile to the working class. Podemos and Sumar oversaw the deployment of riot police against striking metalworkers in Cádiz and mobilised tens of thousands of police to suppress the nationwide truckers’ strike in 2022. Their record underscores that they are not opponents of militarism and austerity, but active enforcers of both.

The bankruptcy of attempts to oppose the war through the capitalist establishment is further illustrated by the nationalist response of Podemos to the war against Iran, which has centred on pressuring the Sánchez government and the Spanish bourgeoisie to pursue a more aggressively independent military policy from Washington.

The strategy of European “strategic autonomy” advanced by Podemos represents an alternative route to escalating militarism. Former Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias articulated this perspective bluntly, declaring that Trump’s trade threats should be answered with Europe developing its “own nuclear deterrence system,” led by France. Such a programme entails massive increases in military spending, intensified attacks on social conditions, and the strengthening of the repressive state apparatus to confront working-class opposition.

The role played by the CRT in Spain substantiates the warnings made by the WSWs regarding the Morenoite tendency’s rechristening as the Permanent Revolution Current. As the WSWs explained, this initiative does not represent a return to orthodox Trotskyism or a genuine reassertion of Trotsky’s Theory of Permanent Revolution, but rather a repackaging of its orientation toward alliances with social-democratic, Stalinist and Pabloite forces.

As the statement of the Socialist Equality Group in Brazil explained, this is “a critical political reorientation” aimed at preparing the organisation “to divert [emerging struggles] from the road of socialist revolution and back into the arms of the national bureaucratic apparatuses that defend capitalism.”

The decisive question is the building of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class. The fight against imperialist war cannot be waged through appeals to, or alliances with, the pro-imperialist trade union bureaucracies, nor with social democratic parties, Stalinist organisations and “left populist” formations that are organically tied to the capitalist state.

These forces have demonstrated, in Spain and internationally, that they function not as opponents of war, but as its political enablers—diverting mass opposition into safe channels, suppressing independent working-class struggle, and enforcing austerity and militarism at home.

A genuine anti-war movement requires the independent mobilisation of the working class on an international scale, through the development of rank-and-file organisations in workplaces and communities, and the unification of workers across national borders against imperialism. This struggle is inseparable from the fight against capitalism. The alternative to war is not pressure on capitalist governments, but the conquest of political power by the working class and the reorganisation of society on socialist foundations.



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