

# The “Global Progressive Mobilization”: A bankrupt spectacle in Barcelona

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20 April 2026

On April 17–18, some 6,000 politicians, party functionaries, trade union bureaucrats and assorted hangers-on gathered in Barcelona for what was billed as the inaugural “Global Progressive Mobilisation” (GPM). The summit was convened by Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva under the banner of a “defense of democracy.”

The entire affair was a spectacle of political fraud.

It was not a gathering of opponents of austerity, repression and war, but of their administrators. It was not a mobilization against the far right, but a convention of the very parties and state functionaries whose policies have created the conditions for its advance. It was not a defense of democracy, but an exercise in political branding by representatives of governments that defend oligarchic wealth, fortify the repressive powers of the state and support imperialist violence all over the world.

A very low bar has been set for what now passes as “progressivism.” The term has been emptied of all serious content. It now embraces virtually every politician to the left of Attila the Trump. To qualify as a “progressive” today, one need do little more than impose socially regressive policies with a humane tone of voice, shed a symbolic tear for the poor while attacking wages and social programs, offer ritual sympathy for migrants while fortifying borders against them, and emit a sigh of regret over imperialist slaughter while funding, arming and defending it.

In an earlier period, however limited and bourgeois in character, “progressivism” implied social reform, democratic rights, hostility to entrenched privilege and, in some measure, opposition to the more predatory forms of capitalist exploitation. Today, it signifies the effort to place a morally presentable face on austerity, repression and war.

The roster of speakers made clear what this gathering actually was.

Sánchez, current president of the moribund Socialist International, heads a government that is increasing military spending to record levels, attacking migrants and imposing austerity. His coalition with Sumar performs the function assigned to pseudo-left formations everywhere: to apply cosmetic blush to measures drafted by the banks, the military and the state.

Sánchez was joined by Lula, once presented as the voice of workers and the poor, now a veteran manager of Brazilian capitalism. In a moment of candor, Lula remarked in Barcelona that “left-wing” governments had implemented austerity upon coming to power: “We have become the system.” That much, at least, was true. While declaiming against inequality in Barcelona, Lula’s government continues to approve oil exploitation of the Amazon basin and adapt itself to the demands of capital with all the reliability of a central banker.

Earlier this year, in advance of a meeting with Trump that Lula fervently wished for but never happened, he sanctioned the US invasion and coup in Venezuela, declaring of Trump that “we will work together” and that the return of the kidnapped Maduro “is not the main concern.”

Cyril Ramaphosa was also there. The South African president is not merely a politician. He is one of the richest men in the country, a millionaire representative of the post-apartheid bourgeois order. He was on the board of directors of Lonmin when the company carried out the massacre of 34 striking miners in 2012. As president, he oversaw the starving to death of more than 100 *zama zama* miners at the beginning of this year. As anger mounts from below, Ramaphosa is deploying the military under the pretext of combatting gang violence.

Claudia Sheinbaum also attended, representing a government that speaks in mildly reformist phrases while deploying the Mexican National Guard against workers and migrants at Washington’s behest. Earlier this year, Sheinbaum followed commemoration of the US-orchestrated overthrow of Francisco I. Madero in 1913 by inviting the US Navy Seals to train Mexican special forces.

Then there were the various representatives of European imperialism and the long degeneration of social democracy. This included German Vice Chancellor and Social Democratic Party co-leader Lars Klingbeil, whose government is overseeing a massive €1 trillion military and infrastructure spending plan aimed at making Germany “fit for war.” This, Klingbeil said in February, is the necessary response of Germany to a world where “strength and power are returning as the dominant motives of international politics.”

David Lammy, deputy under UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, was attending on behalf of the Labour Party, which long ago shed any pretense to social reform. As Justice Secretary last year, Lammy was responsible for stonewalling lawyers and doctors attempting to meet with young people on hunger strike after being arrested for protesting the genocide in Gaza. He was foreign secretary when Peter Mandelson, who had ties to sex trafficker Jeffrey Epstein, was appointed ambassador to the US.

And so on, and so on. This is the political refuse of official Europe. These parties have spent decades liquidating the reforms won by the working class, expanding the powers of the repressive state, backing imperialist war and then insisting that they still represent the “left.” They preside over, or seek to preside over, states arming for war, slashing social spending and preparing for confrontation with the working class.

To describe such a gathering as “progressive” is not merely to deprive the word of meaning. It is to legitimize political fraud.

While pitched as response to attacks on democracy, almost all of the main speakers carefully refrained from actually mentioning the name “Trump,” lest direct reference to the fascist president of the United States might mar the prospect of future business arrangements and trade deals.

And while making occasional rhetorical criticisms of the war against Iran, all the major parties represented in Barcelona support the US-NATO war against Russia. Exactly one month before the summit, on March 18, Sánchez hosted Volodymyr Zelensky at the Moncloa Palace and announced a new €1 billion package of military aid to Ukraine for 2026, bringing Spain’s cumulative support since 2022 to nearly €3.8 billion.

The European social democrats present—Klingbeil of the German SPD, co-leading a government that has become one of the world’s major arms suppliers to Ukraine; Lammy of Britain’s Labour government, another principal backer of the war; Löfven, associated with Sweden’s integration into NATO over this conflict—are not critics of imperialist policy. They are among its political representatives.

Of course, we cannot neglect the representatives from the United States. The two American Democrats in attendance—Senator Chris Murphy of Connecticut and Minnesota Governor Tim Walz—performed the function assigned to the Democratic Party. Walz actually spoke the word “Trump,” calling him a “feeble-minded, trigger-happy president” who had launched the Iran war “where no threat was present, with no clear objectives and no exit plan.” Murphy declared that “Donald Trump is out to end our democracy” and that “we are not on the verge of a totalitarian takeover, we are in the middle of it.”

In their mouths, such phrases are empty. If the United States is in the midst of a totalitarian transformation—and here what Murphy said was true—the Democratic Party is not fighting it but adapting itself to it. It votes for war budgets for the military-intelligence apparatus, backs the machinery of repression and blocks any independent political movement of the working class.

Hillary Clinton, one of the principal architects of the regime-change operations that devastated Libya and Syria, was granted the honor of a video address. The organizers evidently concluded that no conclave of political frauds would be complete without a benediction from one of the high priestesses of imperialist regime change.

Nor, for that matter, would such a gathering be complete without the presence of Zohran Mamdani.

The newly elected mayor of New York City and member of the Democratic Socialists of America delivered a video message that was revealing precisely for its emptiness. Mamdani, elevated through the familiar pseudo-left process of making social promises while remaining safely within the framework of the Democratic Party, thanked Sánchez for convening the summit, observed that there were many crises and conflicts in the world, noted that rent is high and called for collective action against inequality.

What he did not say was more important. He did not mention Trump. He did not mention Iran. He did not mention Gaza. He did not mention Lebanon. He did not mention the deportation operations being carried out against immigrants in New York. He did not even use the word “war.”

Mamdani and the DSA exist to absorb radical sentiment, strip it of political clarity and redirect it into the dead end of Democratic Party politics. In a speech on his 100 days in office a week ago, Mamdani focused his record of achievements on the filling in of potholes, in

what he called “pothole politics.” “The phrase deserves to survive, if only as an accidental monument to the political bankruptcy it was meant to disguise.

The speeches in Barcelona were framed in the language of “democracy,” “rights” and “social justice.” The actual business of the governments represented there is conducted in the language of arms contracts, supplies of critical minerals and trade agreements. On April 19, one day after denouncing the “warlords and tech magnates” who supposedly “destroy democracy, workers and nature,” Lula flew to Germany to open the Hannover Messe, the world’s largest industrial trade fair, where Brazil was this year’s official partner country.

There, alongside CDU Chancellor Friedrich Merz, Lula celebrated the impending EU-Mercosur trade agreement and broader cooperation in artificial intelligence, critical minerals and data centers. This is the real content of the “multilateralism” praised in Barcelona: not international solidarity against war and austerity, but a strategic and commercial alignment among capitalist powers seeking secure access to markets, raw materials and supply chains essential to the digital economy, the arms industry and Europe’s accelerating rearmament.

The ruling classes of every major country are arming to the teeth. They are cultivating fascist movements as battering rams against the working class. The war against Russia, the genocide in Gaza, and the bombardment of Iran and Lebanon are the opening stages of a new imperialist conflagration. And in the face of all this, the assembled “progressives” in Barcelona produced 15 agreements, a critical-minerals deal, a proposed UN panel on inequality and a reforestation target.

The shamelessness of it all was almost breathtaking. Faced with war, dictatorship and social collapse, they answered with bureaucratic vapor.

The pretense of opposition to Trump, stripped of all verbiage, comes down to this: a request that he moderate his rhetoric, consult his allies and observe proper diplomatic etiquette before ordering the next bombing—and prosecute the war against Russia.

The task facing the working class is not to pressure these people, or to wait upon them. It is to break politically from the parties they represent—from the Democratic Party in the United States, from the PSOE, PT, SPD, Labour and their pseudo-left satellites—and to build in every country an independent movement of the working class, armed with an international socialist program.

That is the only basis on which fascism, dictatorship and imperialist war can be fought. Nothing in Barcelona pointed in that direction. Everything was designed to prevent it.



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