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By Alejandro López
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Madrid threatens migrant rescue ship with massive fines

The acting Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is threatening the migrant rescue charity boat Proactiva Open Arms with huge fines if it continues rescuing migrants. It is part of the mounting assault on migrants throughout the world by capitalist governments, which, facing mounting domestic political opposition, are promoting nationalism and xenophobia.

The letter addressed to Open Arms, leaked to Europa Press, was signed by Benito Núñez Quintanilla, the general director of the Merchant Navy, an agency of the Ministry of Development. Quintanilla warned the NGO it would commit serious legal “violations” if it attempted to re-launch its rescue campaign. He threatened Open Arms with fines of €300,000 to €901,000 if the organisation continued to rescue migrants adrift in the Mediterranean Sea.

The government also threatened to “make effective” the stranding of the rescue boat in port if it continued their activities in the sea “without authorization,” also threatening to suspend the boat’s license if the NGO makes “serious or very serious breaches of maritime safety.”

The letter was sent the same day Carola Rackete, the 31-year-old German sea captain of the refugee rescue ship Sea Watch 3, was arrested by the Italian government and its fascistic interior minister, Matteo Salvini. Rackete’s supposed “crime” was to rescue 52 African refugees, including pregnant women and children, stranded in the Mediterranean Sea on June 12, and provide their safe transfer to the Italian territory of Lampedusa.

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Proactiva Open Arms reacted to arrest by announcing on Twitter, “we were blocked for six months [by the PSOE government]. We are not taking it anymore. We are raising our anchors and leaving. We prefer to be prisoners than accomplices [to migrant deaths in the Mediterranean].”

The boat had just unloaded humanitarian aid to the refugee camps in Greece and was anchored in Naples when Rackete was arrested. It is now near the Libyan coast.

The following day Salvini threatened the boat, saying: “Let Spain bring them back or, otherwise (obviously with good manners) we will do it.” On Facebook, Salvini also criticized a post from the NGO stating that “international conventions were born to curb racist and fascist laws.” The fascistic interior minister replied: “How dare these gentlemen?”

Salvini also warned Open Arms and Alan Kurdi of Sea-Eye, a Germany-based rescue organization, with fines, seizures and arrests if the rescue boats continue to rescue migrants.

At a press conference in the European Parliament in Strasbourg, the head of mission of Proactiva Open Arms, Anabel Montes, denounced Spain’s acting PSOE government that “not only turns its back” on migrant rescue NGOs, but “threatens” them with fines. She said, “The government of Spain is putting a price on the lives of these people, and this is not going to make us stop. If we have to decide between being accomplices in the murder of people or fines, our decision is very clear ... We prefer to be prisoners rather than accomplices and they will not stop us.”

She added that Open Arms did not require any license or authorisation, as international maritime law protects its actions.

Montes said that her organisation was “indifferent” to the amount of the fine imposed by Spain for performing an “active search” for migrants. However, she noted that the economic penalties to be imposed by Spain’s social democratic PSOE regime are higher than those by the Italian coalition government led by Salvini’s neo-fascist Northern League.

The PSOE’s actions confirm once again that the attack on migrants and refugees is a universal process, and that social democrats, like neo-fascists, are happy to let migrants drown at sea. This murderous policy has already left 14,000 dead in the Mediterranean in

the past three years. In the straits of Gibraltar between Morocco and Spain, over 1,000 have died in just a year and a half.

The PSOE government has continued the policies of its right-wing predecessor. Last year, it continued enforcing a policy of instant deportation, which violates international law. It also lobbied to provide further EU funds to Morocco for anti-immigrant operations. No sooner had €55 million been authorised for Morocco and Tunisia than Rabat unleashed brutal crackdown on migrants, including beatings, storming apartments without court orders, and bussing hundreds of migrants to the desert. The raids by Moroccan security forces left two youth dead, one of whom was only 16.

The terror campaign has been adamantly supported by Madrid. Opening a two-day international meeting held in Madrid last Tuesday under the co-chairmanship of Morocco and Spain, Spanish acting Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said he was “particularly satisfied” for “the intense work developed with Morocco,” on efforts to curb migration.

All governing parties in Europe—from the social democratic PSOE Spanish government, Germany’s grand coalition, and the openly far-right governments in Italy, Austria, and Eastern Europe—are cooperating so closely to intensify the terror against refugees and migrants. The pseudo-left are also actively enforcing this fascistic policy.

Greece’s ruling pseudo-left party Syriza has not only played a pivotal role in imposing EU austerity that pauperised millions of Greeks, but has also been at the forefront of cracking down on migrants. More than 70,000 refugees are interned in overcrowded camps on the Greek mainland and islands as a result of the EU deal with Turkey, which stipulates that all refugees crossing into Greece from Turkey be interned until their case is processed—so they can be deported back to Turkey. For this, the Syriza government received more than €2 billion from Brussels.

Syriza’s ally in Spain, Podemos, is currently deep in talks to form a pro-austerity and anti-refugee coalition government with the PSOE. So far, the two parties have agreed on a “government of cooperation,” the exact nature of which they interpret differently. The main stumbling block is that Iglesias wants cabinet positions reflecting his party’s weight relative to the PSOE in parliament, whereas Sánchez rejects this idea. In any case, Iglesias has promised that if he is part of the government, Podemos will be “loyal in all state matters.”

Meanwhile, Podemos' main European member of parliament in Brussels, the Pabloite Miguel Urbán, was staging opposition to the crackdown on Open Arms. He came to the European chamber in a rescue boat through the channels of Strasbourg.

Interviewed during the heavily staged event, Urbán said: "We have come in a rescue boat through the channels of Strasbourg, in order to put the debate of criminalization of migrants in the European Parliament. We wanted this debate to come because Europe does not do its homework." He added, "The EU should have a public coast guard to prevent deaths, and instead it favours the criminalization of NGOs which does the job that the EU should be doing. Instead they allow fascist thugs like Salvini to threaten these NGOs."

Urbán said nothing, however, on the PSOE's adoption of far-right anti-migrant policies, Sánchez's threats to Open Arms, or the complicity of his own party.

The fact that the attack on refugees is a universal process underscores the correctness of the International Committee of the Fourth International's perspective. To struggle against these dangerous political developments, which recall the darkest periods of the 20th century, workers and young people must take up a struggle against all factions of the capitalist class and its petty-bourgeois accomplices, based on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

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