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Spain's PSOE-Sumar government holds fraudulent “pro-Gaza” protest in Madrid

On Saturday, Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government organised a “pro-Palestinian” photo-op protest in Madrid as the Israeli government makes final preparations for a bloody offensive into Rafah. Some 1.5 million people are crammed together there, on the border with Egypt, denied food, water and proper shelter.

The Madrid protest had a politically sinister character. It was called by the PSOE, Sumar, Podemos, the Communist Party (PCE) and its trade union allies, Workers' Commissions (CCOO) and the General Union of Workers (UGT), under the banner “Freedom for Palestine. No to impunity, end to the massacre.” Yet all the parties involved are implicated in US-EU backing for the Israeli state's genocide against Gaza.



Spain's PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Economy Minister and first Deputy Prime Minister Nadia Calvino and Sumar's Labor Minister and Second Deputy Yolanda Diaz at

the Spanish parliament in Madrid, Spain on Friday, Sept. 29, 2023. [AP Photo/Bernat Armangue]

A recent report showed that first the PSOE-Podemos government, which ended in November 2023, and then the current PSOE-Sumar government, continued to arm Israel. Last November, a Spanish company exported nearly €1 million in ammunition to Israel. The exports included “bombs, grenades, torpedoes, mines, missiles, cartridges and other ammunition and projectiles, and their parts, including slugs, shot and wads for cartridges.” Furthermore, according to the same investigation, Spain has acquired €705 million in products from the Israeli company Elbit Systems since October 7.

As for the union bureaucracies, they have no intention of opposing the PSOE-Sumar government’s support for Israel. UGT leader Pepe Álvarez joined rallies to support Israel in front of the Israeli embassy called by pro-Zionist groups and met the Israeli ambassador to denounce the “ Hamas attacks” of October 7 to the disgust of UGT members. Affiliated to the ruling PSOE, the UGT has a long relationship with Israel’s corporatist trade union, the Histadrut (General Federation of Land Workers of Israel), which is a pillar of the Israeli apartheid regime, fully supporting attacks on Gaza.

Spain’s largest trade union, CCOO, linked to Sumar, Podemos and the PCE, has made a few statements calling for an end to the war. However, it has refused to call out its members in key Spanish war industries, airports and ports to stop weapons shipments to Israel.

Saturday’s protest, while ostensibly called in defence of Palestinians, was aimed at deflecting mass anger over the PSOE-Sumar’s continued sales of weapons, trade and diplomatic relations with Israel. The union bureaucracies used it to posture as pro-Palestinian, whilst refusing to heed the call by the Palestinian trade union federation last October for industrial action to paralyse Israel’s war machine and stop the genocide.

The PSOE-Sumar protest was attended by around 3,000 people, according to Madrid regional authorities, or 15,000 according to the PSOE-Sumar government. It included six ministers, including Transport Minister Óscar Puente, the first high-ranking PSOE official to attend such a demonstration. Participating for Sumar were leader and deputy prime minister, Yolanda Díaz, and Sumar’s other ministers: Sira Rego, Ernest Urtasun, Pablo Bustinduy and Mónica García. The leader of Podemos and former minister of social rights, Ione Belarra, also attended.

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The pro-Sumar online newspaper Eldiario.es reported: “Despite the broad call, the number of protesters has been lower than other protests in favor of the Palestinian cause.” At the end of the demonstration, *Público* reported, “only a hundred people gathered to listen to the reading of the manifesto.”

The low attendance at last Saturday’s protest does not reflect a lessening of opposition to the genocide in Gaza that has cost the lives of over 35,000 Palestinians, left over 60,000 injured and displaced 2 million people.

Indeed, on January 20, a pro-Palestinian protest in Madrid gathered 50,000, whilst tens of thousands more marched in Barcelona, Valencia, Seville and Granada. The following Saturday, over 20,000 marched in Madrid, again called by mostly civil society pro-Palestinian organisations in Madrid and across Spain. These were part of a global wave of outrage against Israel’s genocidal attack on Gaza which has brought millions onto the streets. New York, London, Paris, Berlin, Istanbul, Stockholm, Baghdad, Jakarta and Kuala Lumpur have all seen demonstrations by tens or hundreds of thousands.

PSOE, Sumar, Podemos and the trade union bureaucracy had no intention of organising such a demonstration. Though they have direct access to the bourgeois media, entire public relations departments and a large following on social media, they barely made any publicity of the event. They even refused to mobilise their own members and union officials. The PSOE claims 172,000 members, while Sumar claims 70,000, Podemos 18,000, CCOO over a million with over 100,000 union officials and UGT 983,521 and 92,000 delegates.

The manifesto calling the demonstration made clear it was a government propaganda event. Whilst refusing to state that the Israeli regime is carrying out a genocide in Gaza, it called for the recognition of the state of Palestine and an immediate ceasefire—calls that Netanyahu will simply ignore. These are the two main demands the PSOE-Sumar government has made in its international diplomacy.

Above all, the low turnout revealed the class gulf separating billions of workers horrified at the Israeli onslaught against defenseless Gaza, and the PSOE-Sumar government and its union allies, which feign sympathy with the Palestinians but continue to arm the Zionist state.

The demonstration did not enjoy the support of the pro-Palestinian organisations that have organized previous protests. This was because it did not advocate any measures against the far-right Netanyahu regime, such as breaking diplomatic relations with Israel, an immediate end to the sale and import of weapons, the imposition of economic sanctions or support for South Africa's complaint before the International Court of Justice. According to a recent YouGov survey, 78 percent of the Spanish population would agree with a total arms embargo.

Certain workers and youth nonetheless attended the protest to chant slogans against the PSOE-Sumar government. A group of Palestinian women shouted into a small megaphone, 'We want to see [Prime Minister] Pedro Sánchez close the Israeli embassy' and, 'We do have another plan, the Nazi Netanyahu to the Criminal Court.' Demonstrators held placards reading, "Israel, genocide state" and "Boycott Israel now."

As the demonstration's manifesto was read at the end, *Publico* admitted, "a group of Palestinians and Muslims organised ... to accuse those who read the official text of being representatives of the government. This led to some isolated confrontation over accusations of collaborationism and betrayal."

The social democrats and pseudo-left politicians intervened to cover their backs. The PSOE walked behind its slogan "Stop the death of civilians. Peace now!" refusing to call the war a genocide. It was led by Transport Minister Óscar Puente, who has allowed Spanish ports and airports to be used to transport weapons and goods to Israel.

Sumar's Yolanda Diaz said: "We have to stop selling weapons to Israel and we have to sanction them, as we have done in identical situations. There is no relativism with human rights." But in reality, Diaz is sitting as a minister in a capitalist government selling weapons to Israel for the genocide.

For her part, Podemos leader Belarra called on the PSOE-Sumar government to end arms sales to Israel so as not to continue being "complicit" in the "genocide" of the Palestinian people. She insisted that if the government "does not immediately stop the purchase, sale and transportation of ammunition and weapons, it will be complicit in this genocide." In reality, however, it has already made itself complicit in the genocide by its months-long arms sales to Israel .

Belarra, it must be added, was covering up her own complicity. In the 45 days from the October 7 Palestinian uprising, until Podemos left government, she sat in government as Madrid traded millions of euros in weapons with Israel.

Stopping the Gaza genocide requires mobilizing workers across Europe and internationally against all these bankrupt pseudo-left parties oriented to the capitalist state and imperialist diplomacy. The struggles of the working class must be forged into a united international struggle against genocide, imperialist war and capitalism, and for socialism. This requires building a revolutionary Trotskyist vanguard, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International, in struggle against pseudo-left parties like Sumar and Podemos.

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