

Spain: Podemos supports sale of warships to Saudi Arabia

By Alejandro López
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The pseudo-left party Podemos has joined with the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) and the CC.OO trade union to support a call from the Socialist Party (PSOE) in Cádiz, urging Madrid to speed up the sale of warships to Saudi Arabia. Cádiz is the location of one of the three major shipbuilding centres belonging to the state-owned shipbuilders, Navantia.

According to the online newspaper *La Marea*, the Cádiz PSOE resolution of February 17 states, “We have no doubt that for Navantia, and thus for the Cádiz Bay, the contract signed with the Saudi Arabian Navy will be a lifesaving measure that will guarantee the viability of its shipbuilders and its auxiliary industries. It would clear the future in the short and medium term because, in addition to generating jobs, it would allow for the continued employment for the majority of its workforce.”

The resolution was supported by Podemos’ local front, For Cádiz Yes We Can (Por Cádiz sí se puede) and the IU, alongside the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the nationalist Andalusian Party. Cádiz’s mayor, José Manuel González, a former member of the Pabloite Anticapitalist Left (IA) organization, and one of Podemos’ “mayors of change,” supported the sale on Twitter saying that “if there is any doubt, this team of local government supports any initiative which increases the workload in Cádiz bay’s shipbuilding.”

Antonio Romero, another Podemos mayor from neighbouring Puerto Real, supported the decision, stating, “The important thing is employment, whether it comes from [Saudi] Arabia, Venezuela or Germany.”

Jorge Suárez, IU mayor of the northern city of Ferrol in Galicia, where another Navantia might benefit from the Saudi contract, struck a pose of concern over the deal, declaring, “I have problems with my conscience over these contracts.” He was, naturally enough, not

opposed to building warships per se, adding, “It is not the same to build warships for Norway as it is for Saudi Arabia.” But his moral qualms were in any event soon dispensed with, as he insisted, “The situation in the [Ferrol] region is what it is [...] Between conscience and hunger...”

Cádiz mayor González urged a continuation of “international diplomacy” by Spain, urging “Saudi Arabia to respect human rights.” The same line was parroted by Let’s Win Jerez (Ganemos Jerez), which abstained in the Cádiz vote. This localist pseudo-left party argued that the motion should have added a paragraph defending human rights and opposing terrorism.

Saudi Arabia is an absolutist monarchy headed by the House of Saud, a reactionary regime that serves as one of the main tools of imperialism in the Middle East. At home, the regime oversees a brutally repressive machine, which terrorizes political opponents with barbaric state murders including crucifixions and public executions.

Abroad, the regime has stoked up sectarian war in Syria to remove Iran’s principal ally in the region, funnelling weapons and money for Sunni Islamist militias which has led to the destruction of the country. Hundreds of thousands have been killed and millions forced to migrate. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia has intervened directly, bombing the country and imposing a naval blockade.

The motion serves to cover for Spain’s increasing militarism and the country’s arms industry, which has profited out of the bloodbath in the Middle East.

The pseudo-left forces join with the CC.OO, Spain’s largest trade union. Jesús Peralta, president of the Navantia works council, stated in a press conference, “If we don’t do it, other countries will”. He urged

Podemos mayors of Cádiz and Puerto Real (who both support the sale) to “tell your boss [Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias] to shut up regarding the contract with Saudi Arabia, because if not he will f*** over 10,000 families.”

This was a reference to Iglesias’ statements made in November, calling for Spain to revise its relations with Saudi Arabia over its support to groups like the Islamic State. He made these comments in the pre-December election period, when all the bourgeois parties were lining up behind France after the Paris terror attacks, attempting to exploit anti-militarist sentiment among workers and youth in Spain.

In January, Podemos published a statement condemning the state-murder of 47 Saudi oppositionists and calling on the Spanish government to stop the sale of weapons to the regime.

In reality, Iglesias and Podemos are pro-imperialist and militarist politicians. Iglesias has launched campaigns for recruitment in the army, and has met with military associations. Last year, he proudly announced that former Chief of the Armed Forces General Julio Rodríguez Fernández, who led Spain’s participation in the 2011 NATO war in Libya, would be a Podemos candidate in the December election in Zaragoza province. Podemos also refused to join the annual protest outside the US-NATO base at Rota, claiming jobs would be lost if it closed.

After the deadlocked December 20 election, Podemos spent weeks attempting to negotiate a so-called “left coalition” government with the PSOE, although the PSOE announced last week that it had reached an agreement with the right-wing Citizens party.

The PSOE has supported US-led wars, signed up last year to the renewal and extension of the bilateral defence agreement with the US, allowing Washington permanent use of the Morón air base in Seville and its use as a home for the Special-Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Crisis Response-Africa, subordinated to the US Africa Command (AFRICOM).

Unsurprisingly, when contacted by *La Marea*, Podemos and IU refused to answer questions about the actions of its local branches in Ferrol, Puerto Real and Cádiz.

The latest development is a further step in the consolidation of the “common front” established between the shipbuilders, the Spanish government, the

unions and IU. As the World Socialist Web Site in 2013, when the European Union fined Spain for illegal tax breaks to the Spanish shipbuilding industry, “This ‘common front’ has existed for years, as the unions have sought to suppress opposition from workers to the Spanish ruling elite’s restructuring and privatisation of the shipbuilding industry in response to global competition.”

These forces seek to exploit workers’ need for jobs to further their militarist agenda and demobilize opposition to the drive to war while they work with the government and shipbuilders to insist on further restructuring, wage cuts, and attacks on workplace conditions. This betrayal has already led to a terrible social crisis in towns where shipbuilding once dominated. Cádiz suffers 40 percent unemployment; in Ferrol, it’s 26 percent. Massive depopulation has taken place as a result.

The alternative requires a conscious struggle by the working class for socialism and internationalism, in a political rebellion against the pseudo-left parties and the trade unions. As Spanish imperialism seeks to join the scramble for Africa and regain influence in its former South American colonies, the pseudo-left forces are coming to the fore in defence of the appetites of the Spanish ruling class for markets, profits and regional influence.

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