

Top Spanish pseudo-lefts hail Italian neo-fascist government

By Alejandro López
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Only weeks after Sahra Wagenknecht of Germany's Left Party launched the #Aufstehen movement on a xenophobic, anti-immigrant platform, top associates of Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias have come out in support of Italy's far-right government. This comes amid reports that sections of Podemos are preparing to build an Aufstehen-type movement.

Long-standing Stalinists Héctor Illueca, Manuel Monereo and Julio Anguita posted an article titled "Fascism in Italy? Dignity Decree" in the pro-Podemos website *Cuarto Poder*. The Illueca-Monereo-Anguita article was widely covered in Spanish social media and bourgeois papers. In it, they endorse the Italian coalition government of Matteo Salvini's neo-fascist Northern League with the Five Star Movement led by Luigi Di Maio, Italy's most right-wing government since Mussolini's overthrow at the end of World War II.

The article unambiguously applauds the Italian neo-fascists' recent "Dignity Decree," hailing it as "a turning point in the social policies applied in Italy since the eruption of neoliberalism." The decree cuts the maximum length for temp contracts from three years to two, but boosts fines payable to employees in cases of unfair dismissal. The article hails as "brave," because it supposedly questions the "neoliberal construction of the European market," the decree's sanctions against companies that relocate or make employees redundant after having received state aid.

The Podemos authors also hail the Dignity Decree's provisions banning gambling advertising. They write, "By proceeding in this way, the Italian government is assuming the defence of the popular classes against powerful and influential pressure groups."

The authors conclude, "The Italian government seems to be the only one that has taken note of the important Resolution of the European Parliament to fight job insecurity" in which "Member States are urged to

eradicate precarious employment and promote quality, safe and well-paid employment. [...] Like it or not, the Dignity Decree is a remarkable effort to defend the Italian people against the lords of finance and relocation. In politics you have to discuss facts and facts. Judging intentions is typical of inquisitors and poor minds that lack rational arguments. Fascism in Italy? Decree Dignity."

The endorsement by top associates of Iglesias of a far-right government overseeing austerity and military intervention in Libya exposes the bankruptcy of Podemos. They are silent also on Salvini's terror campaign against migrants, including the closing of ports to fleeing refugees and attacks on the Roma population. This is because Podemos itself is based on a populist-nationalist programme, and significant sections within that party are thinking of following the path blazed by Wagenknecht and evolving toward a close alliance with right-wing and far-right forces.

The article's authors are senior politicians closely tied to Iglesias, which underscores that their initiative reflects broader developments in Spanish Stalinist and academic circles. Monereo is a Unidos Podemos deputy in the Spanish parliament who belonged to the Communist Party of Spain and was a co-founder of the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) coalition and of Podemos. He is widely considered to be the political mentor of Pablo Iglesias.

Julio Anguita González was the mayor of Córdoba for the Communist Party from 1979 to 1986, coordinator of the United Left between 1989 and 1999, and General Secretary of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) from 1988 to 1998. Iglesias has repeatedly tried to convince him to stand in elections as a Podemos candidate.

Illueca, a labour and social security inspector in the province of Castellón and associate of Iglesias, has authored several books, including one this year titled *Spain: A liberation project*. He is currently working with

Unidos Podemos to draft a new labour law.

The turn to economic nationalism of layers within Podemos reflects the deep social and economic crisis of global capitalism, and the reaction of the affluent layers in the middle class in the leadership of Podemos to growing strike activity in Spain and internationally. The layers around Podemos are turning to an economic nationalist and militarist agenda, which takes its most unabashed form in the election of Trump and Salvini. They are, moreover, increasingly terrified by the implications of growing strike activity in Spain and internationally.

According to the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organisations, the main business lobby, strikes called between January and August led to the loss of 9.5 million hours of work, up nearly 50 percent from 2017. There were 348 strikes in Spain during that time, in which 633,936 workers participated.

The total number of workers participating in the strikes grew by 217 percent compared to the previous year. The major sectors include transport (Ryanair, airports, taxi, Deliveroo, metro), retail (Amazon, H&M), postal services, public health care, social services and many more.

The rising tide of workers' struggles in Spain and across Europe have terrified the Stalinist circles around Iglesias. They played a central role in negotiating the 1978 Transition to parliamentary rule with Spain's fascist Francoite regime, with Communist Party leader Santiago Carrillo personally helping to draft the 1978 Constitution. In a 2012 interview, Iglesias himself hailed Carrillo, who oversaw the murder of Trotskyists and left-wing workers during the Spanish Civil War that brought the fascists to power.

Now, they are desperate to block the emergence of a political movement in the working class challenging European capitalism on a socialist, that is, Trotskyist program. It is widely understood in the Spanish political system that leading circles within Podemos are following Wagenknecht, and preparing explicit alliances with right-wing or even far-right groups.

According to Monereo himself, in an interview in *Cuarto Poder* last Saturday, they aim to build an "association in the service of the Third Republic." This movement to replace Spain's current constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary republic should emerge from a "political and cultural debate" that would "go beyond Unidos Podemos and the left ... The Third Republic will not only be for the left, it will be democratic, federalist, a defender of social rights and will

go beyond the left as we know it today."

According to *El Confidencial*, the authors of the *Cuarto Poder* article are "finalising the launching of a new political space on the Spanish left that completely disregards the tradition of this ideological current," that is to say, Podemos.

El Confidencial adds that it will include "prominent public figures such as Jorge Verstrynge. It will be preceded by a manifesto from which they hope to add more agreements, even from 'more to the right' figures. Their objective, they insist, is to connect with broad layers of the population that 'are demanding security, order and protection.' That is, 'the losers of globalization,' who would reject, according to their theses, solutions to their problems 'with more Europe.'"

Verstrynge's participation in such a movement would not come as a surprise. A sympathizer of France's neo-fascist National Front (FN), he was a founder of Spain's main right-wing party in the post-Francoite era, the Popular Alliance (AP), and its general secretary from 1979 to 1986. After it merged with other right-wing groups in 1989, the AP became the Popular Party (PP), the name under which it is known today.

After leaving to join the Spanish Socialist Party in the 1990s and becoming an adviser to Stalinist IU leader Francisco Frutos, Verstrynge became close to the Podemos leadership, especially Iglesias. He calls himself a protectionist, statist, and admirer of De Gaulle ("the last great resister to the American Empire") and FN presidential candidate Marine Le Pen, whom he refuses to call a neo-fascist. He also admires Alain de Benoist, the main theoretician of the French New Right, which brought together the intellectual supporters of the FN.

Iglesias repeatedly tried to integrate Verstrynge into Podemos, though this always provoked opposition from within the party. The presence of such forces inside Podemos, however, and the open overtures to Italian neo-fascism and the Spanish right being made from within Iglesias' inner circle demonstrates their deep hostility to the working class and to Marxism.

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