

# Podemos party backs Spanish internet censorship law

By Alejandro Lopez and Alex Lantier  
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As part of its agreement to form a government with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) after the November 10 elections, the Podemos party has decided not to oppose the caretaker PSOE government's internet censorship law, the so-called "Digital Security Law." It is yet another lesson in the treachery of this petty-bourgeois, "left populist" party.

On Wednesday, Podemos deputies suddenly reversed their public position against the law and declined to oppose it in Congress. They abstained in the vote as PSOE, Popular Party (PP) and Citizens deputies approved the law, which imposes far-reaching attacks on the Internet and on basic democratic rights.

The "Digital Security Law," now widely referred to as the "digital gag law," allows the state to shut down digital communications, Internet infrastructure and apps at will, without a court order. All the Spanish government needs do is invoke public order or national security to have full powers to censor and shut down the Internet. Control of the infrastructure then goes to Spain's National Cryptographic Center (CCN), a division of Spanish intelligence.

The law states, "The government, on an exceptional and transitory basis, may agree on the assumption by the general state administration of direct management of or intervention in electronic communications network and services in certain exceptional cases that may affect public order, public safety or national security. This exceptional power ... may affect any infrastructure, associated resource or element or level of the network of service that is necessary to preserve or restore public order, public safety and national security."

The principal purpose of this law is to silence domestic political opposition and prevent mass demonstrations and strikes against unpopular government policies. This law became a subject in the November 10 election campaign when the PSOE government, facing mass protests against

its jailing of Catalan nationalist political prisoners, tried to suspend the "Tsunami Democratic" app used to coordinate mass protests in Catalonia. Having passed a decree to authorize its policy, the PSOE is now enshrining it as a law with parliamentary approval.

During the election campaign, Podemos officials felt compelled to denounce the decree and plans to enshrine it as a law, which face overwhelming popular opposition. Ada Colau, the Podemos-backed mayor of Barcelona, Catalonia's largest city, Tweeted that the PSOE "passed a law to intervene on the Internet on 'public order' grounds. This is a grave attack on fundamental rights and freedoms, we cannot accept this!"

During the campaign, Podemos general secretary Pablo Iglesias called it an authoritarian measure. "Anything which means intervening in the Internet without judicial review is authoritarianism," he declared, adding that "issues in Catalonia cannot be resolved through executive-police actions."

While Iglesias falsely called the law an "electoralist measure"—implying that the PSOE crackdown in Catalonia is popular, whereas polls have repeatedly shown seven in ten Spaniards want to resolve the Catalan crisis through dialogue, not police repression—he also made a warning. "With the excuse of Catalonia, they are cutting rights," he said. It turned out that this would have been correct if Iglesias only had said "we," not "they."

On Wednesday, the domestic partner of Iglesias, Podemos number two Irene Montero, refused to answer questions about her party's position on the Digital Security Law as she arrived in Congress. She said she would have discussion with acting PSOE Economy Minister Nadia Calviño, who was part of the team defending the law in the Congress.

Podemos then intervened in the debate with a cynical charade to imply that they would "improve" the Internet censorship law after it was passed. Speaking in the

Congress, Podemos deputy Anton Gomez Reino read out a series of purported improvements to the law, such as “judicial control of all executive decisions” or guaranteeing “fundamental rights and public liberties of citizens.” Calviño played along, pretending to take notes during Reino’s speech. However, since Reino had no power to include these proposals in the text of the law, this was an empty gesture.

Podemos deputies then abstained in the vote on the law, so it could pass with PSOE, PP and Citizens votes. They allowed the fascistic, far-right Vox party to posture as the opposition party, as it was the only party in Congress to oppose the bill and criticize this attack on basic democratic rights. Vox lawmakers called the law a “trojan horse” and a “digital thermonuclear button” giving the state “control of (people’s) voices and data.”

The support of Podemos for such a law is a warning on the character of its electoral alliance with the PSOE. This pact commits Podemos not only to billions of euros in social cuts and military spending increases the PSOE has agreed with the European Union, but to the building of a police state regime in Spain targeting social protest, above all in the working class. Writing to the Podemos membership after signing the deal with the PSOE, Iglesias boasted that “we will face many limits and contradictions, and we will have to give up on many things.”

It exposes yet again “left populist” parties of the affluent middle class like Podemos, Greece’s Syriza (“Coalition of the Radical Left”) and their affiliates across Europe. In 2015, Syriza took power in Greece, pledging to end austerity. Ultimately, it capitulated to the European Union (EU) to preserve its relations to the European banks, imposing tens of billions of euros in austerity measures targeting Greek workers, setting up mass detention camps for refugees, and selling arms for the brutal Saudi war in Yemen.

The entry of Podemos into an emerging government coalition with the PSOE this year marks a further stage in the exposure of these counter-revolutionary, pseudo-left organizations.

In her book *For a Left Populism* published in 2018, Podemos advisor Chantal Mouffe claimed these parties were based on “a left populist strategy aimed at the construction of a ‘people,’ combining the variety of democratic resistances against post-democracy in order to establish a more democratic hegemonic formation. ... I contend that it does not require a ‘revolutionary’ break with the liberal democratic regime.”

Such rhetoric is exposed yet again as reactionary charlatanry. Amid growing social anger and an international resurgence of class struggle, these pseudo-left forces do not seek to organize democratic opposition to the capitalist order. They seek to protect their privileges and wealth not by building a “democratic” movement, but a police-state regime. All the subsequent denials emerging from the periphery of Podemos reek of hypocrisy and lies.

Writing yesterday in *Publico*, Podemos founder Juan Carlos Monedero promised implausibly that if the PSOE and Podemos ever assemble a parliamentary majority and form a government, they would rapidly repudiate the digital gag law. He wrote, “This is a fight where you cannot give in, and that is why the abstention has been in exchange for the fact that, as soon as there is a government, a bill will be processed that will be radically different from the one that has been approved.”

The *Anticapitalistas*, the affiliates of France’s New Anticapitalist Party inside Podemos, complacently wrote that Podemos had swallowed its “first toad.” It added, “The government approved the digital gag law thanks to the right and the shameful abstention of Podemos. It’s a bad omen for this legislature, which begins by cutting democratic rights and guarantees.”

As for Iglesias, he is boasting after this reactionary attack on democratic rights that he will intensify his collaboration with the PSOE. Yesterday, Iglesias acknowledged that discussions inside a PSOE-Podemos-led coalition government “will be complex.” However, he boasted that he would in all cases be publicly loyal to the PSOE and suppress any public criticism of its right-wing agenda: “This discussion will remain in the Council of Ministers, and publicly we will have a pro-government position.” That is to say that for Iglesias, these types of attacks will continue and intensify.

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