

Spain's PSOE-Sumar government threatens mass expulsions of migrants and refugees

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In Dakar, Senegal on Wednesday, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez of the PSOE-Sumar coalition government declared that expelling undocumented migrants and refugees from Spain is “essential.” Speaking during a West African tour aimed at curbing migration to Spain and Europe, he claimed these expulsions sends a “disincentive, clear and forceful message to the mafias and to those who put themselves in their hands.” He claimed security is his “top priority.”

In a law-and-order speech that could have been given by any far-right European politician or US presidential candidate Donald Trump, Sánchez claimed the mafias “only play with the lives of our compatriots, breaking the future of many young people who are deceived and the hopes of the families who trust them, but they also associate and spread other crimes such as illicit trafficking of all kinds and also terrorism.”

Such claims are ludicrous. While many migrants pay smugglers to help transport them in dangerous journeys, usually in makeshift boats across the Mediterranean or through the even more dangerous route to the Canary Islands off the coast of West Africa, the root causes for this do not lie in “mafias.” They are to be found in the poverty, wars, the corporate destruction of livelihoods—particularly fishing,—and climate change that are themselves the product of the crisis of capitalism.

In the first five months of this year, over 5,000 refugees died—an average of 33 deaths per day—on the perilous Atlantic route to the Canary Islands, now the deadliest migration path in the world. This crisis intensified after agreements between the European Union and Tunisia led to a 66 percent drop in arrivals to Italy—largely due to brutal police violence against migrants by Tunisian authorities. Consequently, the Canary Islands route is rapidly becoming the last resort for many desperate refugees.

Sánchez’s attempt to link “terrorism” with undocumented migration is baseless and part of a broader strategy to criminalise immigrants and provide pretexts to advance Spanish imperialism’s geopolitical interests in West Africa. Under the previous PSOE-Podemos government, Sánchez successfully pressed NATO to define migration as a “hybrid threat” in its 2022 strategic document, which also emphasized the need to defend NATO’s “southern flank.”

Madrid launched a murderous crackdown on refugees and

asylum seekers, with one atrocity coming just days before NATO’s document was approved. The PSOE-Podemos government orchestrated the infamous Melilla Massacre, where Spanish and Moroccan security forces caused the deaths of at least 100 migrants through suffocation from tear gas, beatings, and the ensuing stampede. This revealed the Spanish ruling class’s intent to use the arrival of a few thousand refugees as a pretext for neo-colonial interventions in resource-rich regions of North and sub-Saharan Africa.

Masses of migrants are fleeing wars backed by Spanish imperialism. Many new arrivals come from Mali, passing through the impoverished nation of Mauritania, which currently hosts 200,000 Malian refugees despite having only 4.7 million inhabitants.

In 2021, war broke out between militias and jihadist groups and the Mali authorities. The war itself erupted after the country was plunged into chaos following NATO’s intervention in Libya in 2011, which was imperialism’s response to the revolutionary uprisings of the working class in Tunisia and Egypt that same year. Spain, under a PSOE government, also participated in the war, which was led by then Chief of the Defence Staff General Julio Rodríguez Fernández. He would later be recruited by the pseudo-left Podemos party as a candidate for the 2015 general elections.

Capitalist-induced climate change is also displacing large numbers of migrants due to the increases in surface temperatures, hot extremes, sea level rise, high-intensity precipitation, as well as frequency and severity of coastal flooding. In 2022, Nigeria alone experienced over 2.4 million internal displacements, primarily caused by severe floods. According to the World Bank, climate change could force up to 86 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa to migrate within their own countries by 2050.

In countries like Senegal, European fishing corporations, particularly Spain’s, also play a role in destroying the livelihoods of local fishermen, the industry which employs 17 percent of the population. Over-fishing, industrial competition between Senegalese wooden canoes and large European vessels that catch far larger volumes of fish, and the impacts of climate change on the volume of fish, are all provoking a collapse in living standards.

Despite Sánchez's fascistic anti-migrants calls, the Spanish ruling class cannot dispense itself from migrant labour. On his tour, Sánchez's signed circular migration agreements with Mauritania, The Gambia and Senegal.

It allows Spanish corporations to hire cheap labour from countries of origin with the aim of bringing workers to Spain to work seasonally in sectors that face greater challenges in filling vacancies because of low salaries and precarious working conditions, such as agriculture, construction, textile and hospitality. Once their contract—usually a fixed-term one, which cannot last more than nine months each year—ends, the worker then must return to their home country.

This mechanism is not a “progressive alternative” as painted by the PSOE and its ally, Sumar, but aims to create a whole new category of exploited workers, virtually without rights and wholly at the mercy of their employers and the government who may withdraw their contracts at will, and then expel them back to their countries of origins at the slightest protest.

The week-long sickening anti-migrant spectacle of PSOE-Sumar government was joined by the other bourgeois parties. Right-wing Popular Party leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo accused Sánchez's circular migration programmes of provoking more migration. “It is irresponsible to encourage a pull factor in the worst irregular migration crisis” he said. The fact is, the reactionary programme is based on the Migration Law passed in the year 2000 by both the PP and PSOE.

Neo-fascist Vox leader Santiago Abascal intervened to incite pogrom-style attacks on migrants. “They are promoting an invasion. They are doing it hand in hand with the Popular Party and all their international masters, from Ursula [von der Leyen] to Kamala. Spaniards are going to have to start defending themselves on their own. But seriously. Because the governments [...] has directly betrayed, deceived, and sold them out.”

Podemos, now posing as the “left” opposition to the PSOE-Sumar government whilst being a key prop in sustaining the minority government, criticised Sánchez and the PP. Podemos leader Ione Belarra stated, “The PP is just as responsible as the PSOE for a migration policy that puts lives at risk, forcing people to risk their lives at sea. [The answer is] open legal and safe pathways and granting citizenship to migrants who live here without rights.”

However, Podemos, along with the PP and PSOE, bears chief responsibility for advancing the fascist anti-migrant agenda championed by Vox and the EU's draconian “Fortress Europe” policy. During the PSOE-Podemos coalition government (2019-2023), tens of thousands of migrants drowned attempting to reach the Canary Islands. Those who survived the perilous journey were confined in detention centers, constructed under the auspices of PSOE and Podemos, where they endured unsanitary and inhumane conditions while awaiting deportation.

Podemos also made history by deploying the military against

refugees. In May 2021, more than a year before the Melilla Massacre, that also happened under Podemos' watch. The government, with the backing of the European Union, responded to desperate migrants crossing from Morocco into Spain by deploying the army and special forces—marking the first time the military was used against refugees in Spain. This government further violated international law by forcibly returning hundreds of unaccompanied child migrants to Morocco.

The attacks on migrants by the whole ruling establishment, however, does not enjoy mass support among the population, who oppose attacks on democratic rights, austerity, war and militarism.

This class gulf was in full display last Sunday during the Aste Nagusia festivities in Bilbao, the Basque Country, when hundreds of people formed a human wall around street vendors—mostly undocumented migrants—chanting “Manteroekin Bat!” (With the street vendors!) to stop the police from evicting and harassing them.

The federation of organisers of the festivities, Bilboko Konpartsak, issued a statement denouncing police: “We could list the specific incidents, as there have been many attacks against these people. They use violent language, identify them, confiscate their merchandise (which is their livelihood), and sometimes even steal their personal belongings. Unfortunately, this happens throughout the year, including during Aste Nagusia. We find the aggressive and violent behavior of the officers unacceptable, and we want to emphasise that all of this is the result of a political decision.”

The widespread opposition to anti-migrant policies needs to be turned into a conscious movement that defends the democratic rights of the entire working class. Protecting immigrants cannot be separated from opposing imperialist wars and the reactionary nationalism they breed. A true solution to the crisis facing immigrant workers lies in the unification of the working class in a common struggle for a socialist programme, one that guarantees the right of workers of all nationalities to live and work in the country of their choice, with full and equal rights.



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