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Spanish Socialist Party government's progressive veneer cracks

Within two months of coming to power, the progressive pose struck by Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) has become thoroughly discredited. So too has that of the pseudo-left and Stalinist forces that support it.

The PSOE was installed in June as a minority government following the ousting of Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) administration. It came to power with the help of the Unidos-Podemos coalition (Podemos, United Left – IU – and the Green party, Equo) and the Catalan and Basque nationalists.

PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez, now prime minister, promised his incoming government would be “socialist and equal” and carry out a raft of progressive policies.

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias said his party would support the PSOE's no-confidence in the PP vote “without qualifications.” He declared, “I want to think that it will be responsible and try to organize an integrating government, a government that gives stability to Spain, a government that assumes the challenges of the country in a post-corruption era.”

The PSOE made various feints at a progressive reform agenda—designed first of all to appeal to its own upper middle-class social base and these same layers who gravitate around Podemos. However, its fundamental agenda was one of further austerity for the working class, stepped-up militarism in the service of Spain's geo-strategic ambitions and the restabilising of the Spanish state in the wake of the Catalan independence crisis.

Sánchez swore his oath of office on June 2 without the customary Bible or crucifix. Five days later, he announced that 11 of his 17 ministers would be women. The PSOE then announced a more humanitarian migration policy. Sánchez welcomed the rescue ship *Aquarius* to dock in Spain after its exclusion by the Italian and Maltese governments and granted the migrants on board temporary residency.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska promised to reverse the former PP government's policy of instant deportation of migrant workers at Spain's fortified north African enclaves, declaring, "I'm going to do everything possible to see that these razor wire fences at Ceuta and Melilla are removed."

All this has now changed.

The government has treated the docking of the Open Arms rescue ship in the traditional manner, with the migrants on board held in detention until the police decide what to do with them. Most are expected to be deported to their countries of origin.

The persecution of migrants attempting to enter Ceuta and Melilla from Morocco has increased. The PSOE government is defending their instant deportation by the Civil Guard and is continuing with the former PP government's appeal to the European Court of Human Rights to overturn its condemnation of Spain's "forced return" of two African immigrants at Melilla in 2014.

Spain has also been instrumental in the European Union last month giving Morocco millions of euros more in anti-migrant funding. Police stations have been transformed into detention centres, and raids by the Moroccan security forces increased. Around 1,800 people were arrested in the first week of August, driven south in buses and dumped in the Sahara. Two young Malians, one of them 16, died in the raids.

The PSOE has also reneged on its promise to reverse the PP's education "reforms", which made religious education compulsory in schools and promoted single-sex education. Instead, the government will only "modify" the most "disturbing" elements of the PP model, leaving untouched compulsory religious indoctrination of the country's children.

The PSOE is also stalling over its much-publicised symbolic gesture to exhume the fascist dictator General Francisco Franco from the Valley of the Fallen monument, which also contains the remains of 34,000 Nationalist and Republican soldiers. Faced with the opposition of Franco's family, the PP and the military—some 600 retired officers have now signed a petition—the date for the exhumation has been continually delayed.

"We want the Valley to be a public place of honour to peace, democracy and common memory," said Deputy Prime Minister Carmen Calvo. The idiocy of such a suggestion and

the insult it throws at Franco's victims was noted by Victoria Prego in *El Independiente*, who commented, "What happens is that the Government wants to hide Franco so that his grave does not receive visitors, just as it wants the Valley of the Fallen not to be seen by the Spanish as a Francoist monument but as a center of interpretation of History.

"But that will be impossible for an immovable reason: that monument is Franco's work from the beginning to the end... the Valley of the Fallen is inseparable from the figure of Francisco Franco, and there is no one who is prepared to recognise it."

Elsewhere the new government is escalating attacks on democratic rights. Not only is it continuing to jail Catalan political prisoners after last year's independence referendum, under the fraudulent charge that they attempted to violently overthrow the state, but it is maintaining the PP's law on public security, known as the "gag law." This curtails freedom of speech, prohibits mass gatherings and imposes fines for protesting and making comments on social media.

The PSOE has also abandoned its manifesto promise to overturn the PP's labour reforms, which attack collective bargaining and lower dismissal costs. Instead the "most damaging" aspects will be changed only if they have the consensus of the "social partners" involved, beginning with the employers.

The government has announced that its promised one billion euro banking tax to finance an increase in pensions will not be of an "immediate" character. It has refused to publish the "list of shame" of 700 companies and individuals granted tax amnesties that it had constantly demanded of Rajoy.

Sánchez has retreated on his plans, stated while in opposition, to bring in "a renewed, exemplary monarchy" and is now refusing to open a congressional commission of inquiry into corruption allegations against the former king, Juan Carlos.

Last week in an article in *El Diario*, Unidos-Podemos leaders sought to distance themselves from their rotten role in covering for the PSOE. They revealed that the PSOE had refused to discuss their pleas for a PSOE-Podemos Unidos coalition government once the censure motion was passed, or to consider any of the 20 policy proposals submitted by Iglesias.

Feigning outrage, they complained how the PSOE had changed from "a discourse of change" in opposition "to do what the PP was doing" and refused to consult with them. Podemos deputy and Unidos Podemos group coordinator Txema Guijarro declared, "The Government had a clear commitment and is not respecting it," adding, "It starts to

manifest a very typical PSOE syndrome: it does one thing in the opposition and another in the government, when the time comes to act, they are always ready to disappoint.”

Guijarro made the ludicrous assertion that the coalition’s main function in the coming months will be to “control” the PSOE government. But proof that compliance rather than control will continue came in the same *El Diario* article. In the case of the 2019 budget, which the PSOE failed to get through Congress recently because the PP and Citizens voted against and Unidos-Podemos abstained, the paper declared that the government “does not plan to change its strategy... It will present the same proposal, summoning the groups [that support it] to yield.”