

Pedro Sánchez

“Internationalism is the antidote to the myopic politics of trenches and borders”

On Friday, 25 November 2022, at the 26th Congress of the Socialist International (SI), which was held in Madrid, Pedro Sánchez, Prime Minister of Spain and Secretary-General of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), was elected President of the worldwide organisation of social democratic, socialist and labour parties. We are honoured to publish his acceptance speech in this Progressive Yearbook 2023.

Comrades of the Socialist International,

We are a moment in the historical cause of socialism and in the life of the parties that represent it. But, even if we are just a moment, our belonging to the Parties of the Socialist International explains a good part of our life. For me, the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party has been a school of life in which to grow politically, humanly and morally. Today, on a day full of emotions, I want to dedicate my first words to the militants of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party.

Dear colleagues, on your behalf and on behalf of all Spanish socialists, I assume the presidency of the Socialist International as Secretary General of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party. And to all the delegates, and to the colleagues of the outgoing leadership, I can only thank you for your support in facing this challenge. I will dedicate all my work capacity and effort to one aim: to return the enormous amount of trust that you place in me.

I expressly thank George Papandreou and Luis Ayala. Thank you for your dedication and commitment. I will count on you in this new stage.

From this responsibility, I will put all my efforts into offering new progressive responses to the huge global challenges. I will also put all my efforts into strengthening an organisation whose voice is heard and taken into account in the world. An organisation that unites all the progressive internationalist movements again. We are the home of all the socialist, social

democratic and progressive forces in the world. A Socialist International that embraces gender equality for the outside, but also on the inside: in our own home.

Comrades, I belong to a generation that benefited from the advances of the socialist governments of Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Governments that led the greatest advances in the recent history of Spain. Governments that laid the foundations of the solid welfare state that we have today.

In Spain, the initials of the Socialist Party and the development of democracy are inseparable. All the great social and rights achievements of our democracy have come from the Spanish Socialist Party. But for something like this to be possible, democracy itself had to be established in my country first. And in that fight, we were not alone. Great leaders and socialist parties in Europe and the rest of the world believed in that young and threatened democracy, and they fought tirelessly to strengthen it. Giant figures like Olof Palme or Willy Brandt, relevant members of the Socialist International, which in 1980 held its congress in Madrid with a firm purpose: that democracy finally takes root in Spain. That country, even threatened by the risk of regression, overcame fear to look ahead with a hunger for the future. The optimism of those leaders, coming from all latitudes, made us believe. Together we made possible an old wish we dreamed of in the Second Republic: that no one would ever again steal these people the right to be free.

How can we forget the image of a Swedish prime minister, piggy bank in hand, raising funds for Spanish democrats in exile? How can we forget the demonstrations throughout Europe against the latest barbaric acts of Francoism? How can we forget the support of socialists from so many countries for the Spanish exiles? Spain will always remember that exercise of solidarity by European social democracy and the whole world in defence of our freedom.

We are the country that we are, also, thanks to progressive internationalism.

From there, from the memory of the help received, our vocation to help others to advance today on the path of freedom, democracy and the defence of human rights is born. We forge our collective memory with symbolic experiences in distant countries and continents. Because we are united, in addition to the passion for freedom and equality, by the third principle that emerged from the French Revolution: fraternity.

Every 25 April, many Spanish radio stations play “Grândola vila morena”. We evoke the carnation revolution in that spring in Lisbon that precluded our own. Today in Lisbon, tomorrow in Madrid, our fathers and mothers sang. Every 11 September, we remember Allende, and we are moved by his call to walk the great avenues on which the free man would once again make his way. These are dates on the calendar that go beyond borders and we feel as our own. They feed a shared story that unites us. That is the power of fraternity for the global progressive movement, which this organisation embodies like no other.

Comrades, being on the left builds character. That is why it is so necessary, in complex times like these ones, that we promote the values of common sense, which are the values of social democracy.

On 15 November, the world exceeded 8 billion inhabitants. The question we must ask ourselves is not whether there is the capacity to feed, educate, care for, protect and offer

security to the whole of humanity. The question is: what are we doing wrong so that this does not happen? We are already 8 billion human beings on Earth. Some say there are too many. But the problem is not that there are too many human beings, the problem is that there is a lack of humanity.

In a world marked by geopolitical competition and predatory capitalism, appealing to a multilateral agenda and global collective action is a duty that social democracy must assume as a true principle. Not only because cooperation is a more valuable instinct than competition, but because the defence of multilateralism is in our DNA. And in particular, in the action of the United Nations, an organisation that we helped create after the Second World War. That bond must be strengthened and renewed. We must be an ideological pole in defence of the United Nations, because there is no more suitable forum to combat these global threats that do not stop at our borders.

Our internationalism is the antidote to the myopic politics of trenches and borders. Today, with the withdrawal of a neoliberalism that was only interested in globalising capital and markets, it is time to globalise rights and freedoms; globalise climate justice; globalise equality; globalise democracy and the dignity of the human being.

That globalisation was deliberately ignored by those who led the world into a disaster a decade ago. Those who folded the sails and collected their profits to hide them under a net of opacity in tax havens. Those who, under the excuse of deregulation, consented to modern forms of semi-slavery in the field of work. The merchants of doubt, allies of post-truth and alternative facts to stop the green transition, knowing that the time to act on climate change is running out. These are the ones who privatised obscene profits and socialised losses until they plunged the world into a devastating economic crisis. It is the legacy made of ashes from a decade lost to progress due to the financial crisis. A legacy that we must confront from a renewed and courageous social democratic alternative.

That is what we are doing in Spain.

We have just approved a new social budget and new taxes on large corporations. Social justice and fiscal justice: the right and the far right opposed them, but despite their noise, insults and blockades, we advance. We are moving forward because we protect people. We are making progress because, with European funds, we are strengthening economic growth. We move forward because we are asking big companies for an extra effort while we relieve the social majority of Spaniards. Spain advances because we provide stability to our country and its people at a time when they need it most.

It is the time of the coming socialism.

More than 100 years ago, this organisation raised its voice for world peace. Days before being assassinated, Jean Jaures called on all the workers of the world to unite to “drive away the horrible nightmare”. On the eve of the first world war, only the Socialist International tried to stop the catastrophe with a desperate appeal for peace.

We know the lessons of History. And the price to pay when the people allow themselves to be dragged into the brutality of war. That is why we have the duty to make a global appeal in defence of peace. To be activists of a renewed pacifism based on the defence of

the international legality. It is always others who feed the hatred that leads to war. Social democracy has always been on the side of solutions and of peace.

Putin's invasion of Ukraine shows us the importance of preserving an international order based on rules, based on respect for the territorial integrity of states. We have built institutions to resolve conflicts without resorting to violence. We forged a diplomacy of peace to prevail the word over the force.

All wars, in Ukraine and anywhere else in the world, are a crime against humankind.

We must open the time for diplomacy. It is time to respect international legality. It is the hour of peace. Of the end of the war. And we will work from the Socialist International to put an end to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, and for the cessation of all conflicts in the rest of the continents.

Comrades and friends, I would like to summarise our proposal in the five areas of work that were debated in this Congress.

In the first place, the fight against climate emergency. A just ecological transition. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, expressed it clearly: our choice is to cooperate or perish. It is inconceivable that, faced with the evidence, there are forces that choose to deny and perish. It is not enough to oppose the inertia that leads us to the climatic catastrophe. We must step forward and be clear: the greed of a few can lead humanity towards self-destruction. And that is why I ask you to make a stand: fighting climate emergency is the only possible investment in the future. There is a tremendous injustice, almost existential, in the fact that countries most affected by the climate emergency suffer from the actions of the most developed economies.

The 58 most exposed countries, where a fifth of the world's population lives, are responsible for barely 5% of emissions. The 54 countries of the African continent emit just over 3% of global emissions. And, despite this, they are on the front line suffering the consequences of a devastation that we have a duty to avoid in the name of our sons and daughters.

Second, ending male chauvinism. Feminism, like socialism, is internationalist. There is no more just cause than the defence of full, real and effective equality between men and women. A woman dies violently every 11 minutes in the world. In the face of this barbarism, the firmness of social democracy must be as resounding as our determination to end this infamy. Gender-based violence and sexual exploitation are an intolerable attack on human dignity. Raising your voice is not enough. We must build effective public policies to end the violence that stems from the privilege of men.

Today the women of Iran are rising up against this fanatical privilege. From this forum, which brings together progressive forces from around the world, I want to pay tribute to their courage. And honour their cry for freedom, which no tyrant will ever be able to drown in blood.

You are not alone. For them, today, more than ever, socialism is freedom.

The great revolution of our time is the feminist revolution. And an organisation like the Socialist International, which has the supreme value of equality engraved on fire, must be a driving force when it comes to promoting this transcendental process.

For this, it is crucial to act on two fronts. On the one hand, I want to remember that this is also the cause of men. Support and applause are no longer enough. Women have been building their rights for a long time and it is time for men to start tearing down our privileges. So that men and women can act in real equality of conditions. It is something that we all have to do together, shoulder to shoulder. Because feminism means justice and it concerns us all.

We must fiercely combat the attempts to regress the rights of women that are taking place in different parts of the world. Let's say it out loud: not one step back. Winning this battle requires more women, many more, in positions of responsibility. Today only a quarter of the seats in all parliaments are held by women and here in my own home country, much remains to be done. My commitment to parity is as firm as the steps we are going to take so that women occupy the place that, by right, corresponds to them.

For this I count on you, general secretary. Dear Benedicta Lasi, you are already a symbol of a new time in which we are going to work hand in hand to break down barriers and tear down glass ceilings. It is an honour that the Socialist International has an African woman as general secretary.

Third, it is time for a fair economy to replace the neoliberal model that has prevailed in recent decades. There is no manifest destiny that condemns a country to eternal poverty. There is no reason for poverty to be rooted for eternity in entire regions of Africa, Asia or America. Accepting poverty as something inevitable makes us complicit in neglect. As a socialist, I refuse to believe that nothing can be done and that humanity, with all its knowledge and development, is not capable of correcting such lacerating imbalances. The destiny of a human being at birth cannot be conditioned by the tyranny of chance. A girl in the Sahel should not be condemned for being born there. A child growing up in Central America should not have his dreams mutilated by violence in the streets or drug trafficking networks.

We are socialists because we do not accept the dictatorship of chance and because we believe in the value of politics to combat social injustice. To combat this injustice, we fight those who hide their wealth in tax havens. We tell them that the rights – the health of our loved ones, the education of our sons and daughters, the rights of workers and the well-being of our elders – are rights that demand dignity and will never be commodities to be traded. The economy must be at the service of the people and the planet, not the other way around. More than 350 million children live today in extreme poverty: on less than two dollars a day. 44 million suffer from severe malnutrition in a world that wastes a billion tons of food a year, almost 3 million tons a day. Solving this tragedy would cost just 0.3% of the world's GDP in 2021; a quarter of what multinationals evade.

So, there is an alternative. It is a matter of values and decision.

The path to equality is that of fair forms of redistribution. In 2019, multinational corporations transferred 969 billion dollars of profits to tax havens. That means that countries collected, on average, 10% less in corporate tax than they should have. Stopping this bleeding of resources requires multilateral action. This was demonstrated when, in 2021, 136 countries approved implementing a minimum of 15% in corporate tax from

2023. A first step that must be followed by many others. With measures that guarantee a global trade based on fair and clearly defined rules. With ways to finance developing countries that contribute to it in a real way, instead of becoming heavy mortgages on their future.

Fourth, the Socialist International must have a leading voice in the commitment to decent work and labour rights. It is essential to remember where we come from to know where we are going: the fight for decent work was the embryo from which the Socialist International was born. In Spain, thanks to the labour reform approved by my government, we have made progress like never before in terms of stability and dignity at work. We have placed dialogue and collective bargaining at the centre of labour relations. I ask the CEOE (the Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales) to sit down with the unions to reach now a salary agreement that gives security to workers.

Let us work in three directions: first, in promoting the adoption of trade clauses that require compliance with minimum universal labour standards; second, in strengthening the work of multilateral institutions within the United Nations in defence of labour rights and fair trade; and, third, in guaranteeing the extension of these rights to the jobs generated by the technological and digital revolution.

Comrades, our idea of labour dignity was born as part of the industrial revolution. The technological revolution is now a great opportunity to deepen labour rights. We have a duty to take advantage of this great technological leap and democratise its benefits globally. The division of labour cannot consolidate a world at different speeds, with countries that are left out of a transformation that must imply, above all, more and better jobs globally.

Fifth, we are witnessing a crucial historical moment in the defence of democracy and civil rights. In the last decade, the number of countries with recognisable democratic regimes has been reduced by 20%. And the number of citizens with full rights has fallen by half. It is in this field that, with full awareness, we must make use of the extraordinary political and intellectual legacy that our organisation treasures. Women and men who, with their words, thoughts and actions, inspire us to support the cause of freedom and dignity in the face of tyranny and autocracy.

We are aware that democracy requires certain material conditions that are also those of human dignity. To have a strong democracy, we need a powerful citizenship, and that means citizens freed from poverty and ignorance, protected from the misfortunes of life. Freedom can never be the price to pay for well-being, because without freedom there is no well-being. Ideas change the world, for better and worse. Ideas that are not abstractions, but rather completely condition every aspect of the life of millions of people.

Let's make the Socialist International a great ideological platform that contributes to improving and making democracy grow on the five continents. Because the old principles of freedom, equality and fraternity that inspired socialist humanism are still valid today. Because we are the guarantors of achievements that, unfortunately, are not irreversible: democracy has to be defended day by day.

Dear friends, we are custodians of a unique legacy. No ideology in history has improved the material and spiritual conditions of their societies as much as democratic socialism. We

don't feel better than anyone else for being social democrats, but social democracy makes a better world. We are proud to look back and recognise ourselves in a tradition that has been able to successfully repel the offensives of neoliberalism and reactionary nationalism. Ideologies that respond to their recent failures by returning to a past full of isolation, lack of solidarity and conflict between nations. But today, we are not here to recreate past achievements or the progress of the social democratic ideal, accredited by the response to the pandemic or the consequences of the war in Ukraine. We are here to forge the socialism that comes from hope and not from pessimism. From ambition and not from conformism. From illusion and not from resentment. We are here, as social democrats, to respond to the great challenges of our time, with the climate emergency as a top priority. To respond with accurate diagnoses and concrete proposals. And to do it with proposals that assume the plurality of an organisation like ours: strong and representative; that assumes the diversity and particularities of each region that make it up. Proposals with which to create wealth and opportunities in every corner of the planet, in a sustainable and less unequal way. Proposals to renew the generational pact with young people, to whom I want to address my last words.

The Italian writer Claudio Magris says that utopia means not surrendering to things as they are and fighting for things as they should be. To every young person, I call on you to fight for that desire: for things as they should be in a world full of uncertainties.

There are those who insist on calling you the 'snowflake generation' and question your capacity for sacrifice. They seem unaware of your true strength. Your entire life has been marked by the economic crisis, a devastating pandemic and, now, by the shadow of war. For this reason, more than a generation of snowflakes, you are the generation of hope. It will be you who will put an end to hunger and poverty. You will stop the climate emergency. You will find a cure for terrible diseases. And you will take humanity to new frontiers.

Do not let anyone tell you that your destiny is to live worse than your parents, because it is not true. In your hands lies the hope of doing what gave meaning to democratic socialism from the day it was born and to which I want to call you today in Madrid: make a better world.

Thank you very much.