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Palestine solidarity - Spanish state

La vuelta : They did not pass!

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This year's three-week cycle race round the Spanish State, La Vuelta, has set numerous records. Not in terms of sporting prowess, but in regard to the popular mobilisations to stop it being used to whitewash Israel's genocide in Palestine.

The image-cleaning product used in this case was a team called Israel-Premier Tech. It is owned by the Canadian-born, but Israeli resident, multimillionaire Sylvan Adams, who sees himself and the team as ambassadors for his country of adoption. In 2018, he was instrumental in getting the Giro d'Italia to start in Israel.

Pro-Palestinian solidarity in the Spanish State has a long history articulated mainly, but not exclusively, by the Solidarity Network against the Occupation of Palestine (Rescop). Over the past two years, there have been constant, massive mobilisations throughout the country involving even the smallest towns and villages.

Taking advantage of the momentum built up, the movement decided to target Israel-Premier Tech. This began in Catalonia on stage 5 when a relatively small group of demonstrators blocked the road and managed to hold the team up for a short while during a time trial.

As the race moved around the country, almost each stage saw an escalation of the disruption, in spite of a number of arrests, and the demand for Israel-Premier Tech to be thrown out of the competition became stronger. Although the race organisers ignored this, the team eventually dropped "Israel" from its name and put on new jerseys.

This was nowhere near enough for a movement that was having a real impact, not just on the race itself, with stages forced to end several kilometres before the scheduled finish line, but also in the media, on public opinion and even on the Spanish government.

By the time it came to the final stage, which was supposed to be little more than a placid ride round Madrid followed by a prize-giving ceremony with the local authorities enjoying a photo opportunity and publicity for the city, numerous points on the route were already swarming with protestors ready for action.

An attempt to avoid the demonstrators by re-routing the riders had little effect. The roads along which they were due to pass were overrun and the organisers had to call the whole thing off... 55 kilometres short of the programmed finish.

It's true that Israel-Protech was not expelled from the race, but the disruption inflicted, the reputation damage caused and the political repercussions ensuing were rightly seen as a victory for the solidarity movement and hence as a springboard for further action, including around the Global Sumud Flotilla.

Adapting the "¡No pasarán!" (They shall not pass!) of Madrid's defenders against the fascists during the Civil War, it was now possible to say "¡No pasaran!" (They did not pass!).

The next day, the Spanish government, under pressure also for failing to keep its promise to decree an arms embargo on Israel, was obliged to say it supported the actions taken during the Vuelta.

Members of Anticapitalistas (the Fourth International organisation in the Spanish State) played a considerable part, but this was above all a sustained, collective effort that drew its strength from the involvement of tens of thousands of people.

Next year's Tour de France, with Israel-Premier Tech billed to take part, is due to begin in Barcelona. Plenty of time to prepare a hot reception if necessary.

PS:

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