

Spain: Popular Party accused of stealing Madrid election

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An election for the municipal region of Madrid on October 26 gave an overall majority to the governing right-wing Popular Party (PP). This overturned the previous May 25 result, which had given a majority of seats to the two left parties combined, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Izquierda Unida (United Left—IU).

The PP gained 57 seats against 45 for the PSOE and 9 for the IU. (The results in May were 55, 47 and 9, respectively.) Participation was down by 5 percent, from 69.27 percent in May to 64.02 percent. The IU obtained a moderate increase in its vote, but this did not translate into seats and did not compensate for the losses suffered by the PSOE. The number of parties contesting the election shot up to 22 from the 8 that stood in May, including some extreme right and fascist parties. The new Assembly will be constituted on October 12.

The election was characterised in some newspapers as a “regional parliamentary coup d'état”.

The IU and PSOE are making accusations of vote-rigging, appealing the results of several counting tables and demanding a rerun of the election in certain districts. The IU says that 500 of its votes have been wrongly attributed to other parties. If this were found to be correct, the IU might still be able to gain another seat, as it was only 232 votes short of obtaining its 10th seat. The PSOE is also contesting results, stating that some 20 PP auditors voted twice and that in the capital district there were more votes than voters.

The election itself was the outcome of backroom manoeuvres—forced by the desertion of two socialist deputies from their party's ranks.

In May, the IU had stated that it would support the PSOE with its 9 seats, which would have given the PSOE an overall majority of 56. A coalition agreement

had been reached between the two parties. But when it came to vote for the Madrid Assembly presidency on June 10, the two socialist deputies, Eduardo Tamayo and María Teresa Sáez, absented themselves, leaving the PSOE/IU in a minority. This was utilised by the PP to take up the position of temporary president, thus regaining the power that it had previously enjoyed for eight years.

The PSOE demanded that the Assembly withdrew credentials from the two absconders and that the party be allowed to replace them with two socialist runners-up. But after much legal wrangling, the acting PP president decided that fresh elections should be called for October 26. The PP was confident that a second election after the actions of the two socialist deputies would help to increase its vote. In the event, the increase was small compared with what had been predicted, but enough to give the PP a majority.

The two absentee PSOE deputies were immediately expelled from the party, together with their leader José Luis Balbás and several others belonging to a right-wing “renovators from the base” faction (insofar as one can speak of right and left in such a corrupt organisation). Immediately after it became clear that there would be a rerun of the election, this group formed a new party, Nuevo Socialismo, and contested the elections, thus crowning their manoeuvres by stealing votes from the PSOE. The 6,221 votes they acquired would have been more than sufficient to give the PSOE another seat, for which they were short only 3,000 votes.

After their expulsion, Tamayo and Sáez entered the Regional Assembly as a “Mixed Group.” According to the media, 60 percent of the 108,000 euros spent on their election campaign came from the money they obtained from the regional government.

Underlying all these unprincipled and base manoeuvres is a struggle for local government influence and for the profits to be made from the lucrative construction and real estate market in the suburbs of Madrid and surrounding mountains. Second homes and holiday buildings are springing up, and millions are made in buying and selling estate-owned land and buildings.

Although not proven, mainly due to the manipulations of the Investigating Commission and the partisanship of those in charge of the legal procedures, PP members were behind the moves of the two socialist deputies on the day they absented themselves from the vote.

The election resolves nothing. The back-stabbing and manoeuvring will go on.

Neither the PSOE nor the IU represent a genuine political alternative to the PP, which accounts for the right-wing party's ability to carry out its antidemocratic manoeuvres without provoking significant opposition in the working class. There was hardly any difference in the programmes of the three main parties; and the hurried introduction of free transport passes for some young and old people, together with pledges to construct 50,000 affordable houses, fooled no one. Until Tamayo and Sáez betrayed, they had been valued members of the PSOE and were selected to form part of the PSOE electoral lists. The faction they belong to supported the election of the present leader of the PSOE, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, at the party's 35th congress.

There are more than 200,000 unemployed in the region, and 90 percent of youth in Madrid have temporary and casual contracts (of the type that covers 31 percent of all Spanish workers, in contrast with 13 percent of workers in the rest of the European Union countries). Twenty-four-thousand new young voters were entitled to vote on October 26, the majority of whom will never be able to afford a flat, let alone a chalet in the mountains. The average price of a square meter of housing in Madrid is more than 3,000 euros, and double or even treble that in the centre of the city.

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