Spain: New Anti-Capitalist Left party to contest European elections

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The economic crisis in Spain is leaving entire regions devastated. Unemployment has doubled in one year to 14 percent, the highest in Europe, and could reach 20 percent by the end of 2009. Militant demonstrations have taken place in a number of cities. A powerful movement could rapidly develop into a confrontation with the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government, which has spent its time in power propping up big business.

The right wing opposition Popular Party (PP) is mired in corruption scandals and internal warfare after two consecutive election defeats and two other pillars of the state, the Catholic Church and the military officer caste, consistently poll as two of the most unpopular institutions in Spain.

In addition, the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU), founded and led by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE) is fracturing in a hostile faction fight, as its support collapses primarily due to its alliance with the PSOE government.

In an attempt to restore some political credibility, the IU faction Alternative Space (Espacio Alternativo, EA) has set up a new Anti-Capitalist Left party (Izquierda Anticapitalista, IA) to contest the European elections in June. It follows the example of its sister organisations, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste (NPA), set up by the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) in France.

The IA will contest the European elections jointly with the NPA and Italy's Critical Left (SC). The IA, NPA and SC are products of the United Secretariat, which split from the Fourth International under the political leadership of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel in 1953. Rejecting Trotsky's analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy as a counterrevolutionary force, they abandoned the struggle to build independent revolutionary parties in favour of acting as a left pressure group on existing mass reformist and Stalinist parties.

The IA's European manifesto abandons any identification with Marxism or Trotskyism. A set of minimal reformist demands to foster the illusion that an "alternative" Europe can come through reform of its institutions and legislation to force corporations that relocate or lay off workers to return subsidies. A call for nationalisation of the banks without compensation does not mention what form of government would carry out such a measure.

The EA came out of the Revolutionary Communist League (Liga Comunista Revolucionaria, LCR), founded in 1971 as the post war boom ended and opposition mounted to the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco (1939-1975). From its foundation the LCR oriented to the Basque separatist group ETA, which used terrorist methods to pressurise the Francoist state, as well as to the PCE, which had pursued a policy under Francoism of "National Reconciliation" between the working class and the "modern" sector of Spanish capitalism based on a perspective of establishing a bourgeois parliamentary government.

In the "peaceful transition to democracy" (1975-1978) that followed Franco's death, the PSOE and PCE safeguarded capitalist rule by limiting workers to demands for a democratic constitution. In recognition of its support, the LCR was invited to give greetings to the PCE's ninth congress in 1978.

After the fall of the dictatorship, the LCR set about capturing positions within the trade unions—the Stalinist led Workers Commissions (CC.OO) and the PSOE-led UGT—and transformed itself into a party of the upper echelons of the union bureaucracy.

The PSOE came to power in 1982 under the leadership of Felipe González, but disillusionment quickly set in. Rebellions broke out over Gonzalez's decision to join NATO, while industrial action against the closing of steel plants and shipyards built up to a general strike. Despite promises to create nearly one million new jobs, unemployment under the PSOE reached 24 percent.

In the midst of this crisis, in 1986, the PCE created the IU as a coalition of PSOE dissidents, liberals, left nationalists, left groups and Greens. Its programme was to pressurise the PSOE to implement a more left-reformist policy. After initial hesitation, the LCR joined in 1991 and played an increasingly significant role in the IU leadership, providing "Trotskyist" justifications for the organisation's alliance with the PSOE, both in opposition and in government.

The perfidious role of the Stalinist, social democratic and radical left during the transition and after was exemplified by the fact that, after 14 years of PSOE government between 1982 and 1996, the heirs of Franco, the Popular Party under José

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María Aznar, returned to power. After the election the PSOE blamed the IU for the PP's victory and abandoned their electoral pact.

Spain, which had experienced one of the highest growth rates in Europe, entered a new economic and political crisis brought about by its declining competitiveness and low productivity growth, the drying up of European Union subsidies and competition from the low wage economies in Eastern Europe. By 2004, the PP's efforts to introduce labour and welfare reforms aroused popular anger that fed into opposition into its support for the Iraq War in 2003. Under the leadership of José Luis Zapatero, the PSOE government was elected to power in March 2004 as the undeserved beneficiary of a leftward movement of the Spanish working class and winning many votes at the expense of the IU.

Shortly after the election, LCR leader Jaime Pastor defended the EA's continued presence in the IU. After criticising the IU as nothing more than "a complementary force to the PSOE" that conveyed an "image of subordination", Pastor urged its "refoundation" as "a democratic, plural, federalist, anti-capitalist and alternative IU".

In a conference held in December 2007, the EA set out to "formalise" its position "as a structured organisation within the IU". In the run-up to the March 2008 elections the then IU co-ordinator Gaspar Llamazarez offered to take up ministerial posts in a new PSOE government saying, "Let's not set ourselves any limits. We don't have any stigmas that prevent us from participating in the government. It will depend on pragmatic agreements". With the IU lining up with the PSOE on many issues, many of its supporters took the logical decision and voted for the PSOE as the lesser of two evils and as the best means of registering opposition to the PP.

The election result was an unmitigated disaster for the IU, which ended up with less than one million votes, 4 percent of the total, a dramatic decline from its high point in 1996 when it received 2,600,000 votes (11 percent of the total). It was a bitter blow to Llamazarez's faction of the PCE, which had earlier purged the IU of so-called "critics" in the hope of becoming the indispensable partner of the PSOE after the election. Not that the "critics" differed on the IU's essential political orientation. Their main concern was that the IU, in being so uncritical of the government, would no longer be able to maintain any support amongst left-leaning workers that has made it such a useful apologist for the PSOE historically.

EA members holding senior positions in the IU were also demanding that the "image" of the IU as a lobby subordinated to the PSOE government had to change, or else a vacuum would open up on the left. In July 2008, under conditions of collapsing support for the IU, LCR/EA leader Joan Guitart argued for the rebuilding of an organisation playing the same role as the IU but on a more explicitly anti-Marxist basis. He called for a new all-embracing anti-capitalist organisation, the purpose of which would be a "joint revitalisation" based on the experiences of "other organisations" and "currents".

Like its Pabloite sister organisations, the NPA and SC, the IA's vague "anti-capitalism" is a shift to the right. The IA calls for all forces opposed to neo-liberalism to join its project regardless of their class orientation, programme or historical role.

A flavour of the new organisation was revealed in a March 2 report on the IA's website, describing a local "anti-crisis" forum whose "driving force" comprised "some of the most active organisations within the Cádiz social network, such as the trade union CGT, Anticapitalist Left, Ecologists in Action and several Christian ground groups (Workers Pastoral, HOAC or Caritas) To these are added IU and other entities that have demonstrated interest in participating in this initiative".

The IA's founding documents published in November 2008 fail to make a serious assessment of the IU. The only remarks, repeated in different places, are a simple statement of the extent to which the party has become discredited and needs to be "reconnected" with the social struggles. It complains that, "The opposition from the left to Zapatero's policies has been damaged by the policies of reconciliation and demobilisation of CC.OO and UGT and by the lack of a political project independent of the PSOE".

"The present orientation of the (IU) federation is to be an organisation with a vocation to be subordinate to the PSOE", it continues. "It is co-responsible for many policies that are against the interests of the workers, and it remains disconnected from the social struggles and lacks credibility as an instrument useful for the social transformation, despite the fact that there are honest and committed militants in its midst".

The formation of the new organisation was carried through on a thoroughly opportunist and unprincipled basis. It does not rule out future alliances with sections remaining within the PSOE or factions that may break away. The problem for the IA is that it does not have the same public profile as the NPA in France. But it is determined to play the same role of diverting potentially revolutionary struggles back under the control of the PSOE and the PCE/IU. Spokesman Raul Camargo complained that the founding of the IA was "practically unnoticed in comparison with that of the NPA", but hoped that the new organisation would gain from its association with the NPA and its leader Olivier Besancenot.

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