

The refoundation of Spain's United Left: A turn to the banks

Paul Stuart, Alex Lantier
27 July 2010

On June 26 Spain's *Izquierda Unida* (IU, United Left)—a coalition of middle-class parties including regionalist and ecologist groups but dominated by the Stalinist *Partido Comunista de España* (PCE)—held a refoundation congress in Madrid. IU centered its congress on a document, “Call to the Left,” and interventions by leading party figures, including IU General Coordinator Cayo Lara.

The event was a massive political fraud. IU was not “refounding” its policies, but reaffirming its long-standing support for the ruling *Partido Socialista Obrero Español* (PSOE)—despite the policies of austerity and war of PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. However, the effect is a huge shift to the right, as IU moves to defend the massive attacks on the working class planned by the Spanish and European ruling classes.

The principal issue being settled at the congress was how IU would seek to politically disarm the working class, and use its positions in the union bureaucracy to prevent strikes from developing into a political struggle against Zapatero.

The IU assembly invited as guests of honour to the pre-assembly rally a host of Stalinist parties from throughout Europe. First amongst them was Italy's *Rifondazione Comunista*, which helped divert widespread opposition to the Berlusconi government in 2006 behind the bourgeois “center-left” candidacy of Romano Prodi. With *Rifondazione*'s support, notably in a 2007 confidence vote to support his government, Prodi cut workers' pensions and continued Italian participation in the occupation of Afghanistan, in which Spain also takes part.

Other Stalinist fixtures of the European political establishment, including the French Communist Party and Germany's Left Party, were also present at the congress.

In his opening remarks, Lara presented his organization as an ally of the PSOE. He said: “What is necessary is a change of policies to find a social solution to the crisis, and the PSOE government must look for it in the left that exists in parliament to support them.” Lara made clear this was a long-standing IU policy, noting that former IU leader Gaspar Llamazares had “already made the offer several times to the PSOE.”

Lara praised the unions—who have played a key role in negotiating and arranging social cuts with Zapatero—calling

them “the strongest bastion of resistance in the face of the aggression by capital and the policies of the government.”

Despite Lara's praise for Spain's “left” establishment, he was well aware of the massive social discontent growing in the working class. Describing himself as “conscious of the political weakness of this left,” he said it was “time for the transfusion of the social base disenchanting with the policies of the PSOE into this political force of the left.”

This perspective is stunningly dishonest. Having acknowledged that the policies of Zapatero represent “aggression” against the working class, Lara proposes to corral voters hostile to these policies into the IU—an organization seeking to assist and counsel Zapatero! Such dishonesty itself, however, has objective significance: it corresponds to the bourgeoisie's need for a barrier to prevent the working class from breaking with social democracy and adopting revolutionary socialist politics.

After Lara's speech, the floor was given to the very union bureaucrats who are negotiating cuts in pensions and weakening labour laws with Zapatero: Ramon Gorriz of the PCE-aligned *Comisiones Obreras* (Workers Commissions, CC.OO), and Toni Ferrer of the PSOE-aligned *Unión General del Trabajo* (UGT, General Workers Union).

Lara's implicit contention—that the unions and IU could persuade the PSOE to carry out policies that are not harmful to the working class—is false. The policies of the entire political establishment are worked out today in the interests of the world's major banks and financial institutions, who are demanding a destruction of the welfare state throughout the developed world. This is the significance of the June G20 economic summit's decision to demand draconian budget cuts, after governments agreed to a €750 billion bank bailout in May.

These policies have hit Spain particularly hard, as it faces the bursting of a massive housing bubble. The country already faces unemployment of over 20 percent, the second highest in Europe. Europe's highest unemployment, estimated at 23 percent, is in Latvia—which has tripled during the two years of its budget-cutting program, overseen by the International Monetary Fund.

Broad masses of workers now see the PSOE as an open instrument of the financial aristocracy. Like its social-

democratic counterparts in Greece and Portugal, the PSOE has pushed through massive cuts: a 5 percent cut in government workers' wages, a two-year increase in the pension age, and undermining job security afforded to workers through labour laws. Such measures helped the PSOE make €15 billion in cuts in June. However, in order to reach budget-cutting targets set by the European Union, Spain would have to cut roughly €80 billion in spending.

IU's defense of PSOE policies is a clear signal that, in the broad realignment of European and world politics that is taking place, it will reliably defend the interests of the state. This is, in particular, the signal sent by the IU congress document, the "Call to the Left."

The document warns about rising popular discontent with the entire political establishment: "This is one of the worst consequences of the intolerable subordination of the social democracy to the diktat of the markets: the disillusionment of the people on the role of politics and the loss of legitimacy of this democracy."

IU proposes to appeal to the European Union bureaucracy—precisely one of the main forces for imposing cuts on the working class. It writes, "If the European Union does nothing to halt speculation, who will do it?" Warning that the "loss of confidence in a European political solution to the crisis is a major challenge for the European Left," it concludes: "We need a Social European Union, without that the functioning of the economy, political stability, and future perspectives will end up being a game that all of us will lose."

Noting that there is an "ethical, political, and democratic crisis of Spain," IU writes: "Democracy or plutocracy—the alternative is posed in those terms." IU's distinction is completely false. The supposedly "democratic" Zapatero regime has proven itself to be a servant of the plutocracy, by slavishly adopting the massive cuts demanded by the banks.

What this formula excludes is the only viable path: the independent struggle of the working class for socialism and the overthrow of capitalism. This omission is no accident, but stems from the PCE's historical hostility to socialism.

There is a profound significance to IU's defence of Spanish bourgeois democracy: this is a regime in whose construction the PCE and IU were deeply involved. The crisis of the legitimacy of the Zapatero government is a direct political indictment of the policies of the PCE itself.

When the fascist dictator Generalissimo Francisco Franco died in 1975, amid an upsurge of strikes and protests, the PCE suppressed demands for a reckoning with the fascists and an exposure of NATO for its alliance with Franco after World War II. Instead, it took part in secret talks with the PSOE and the fascist Falange that led to the Moncloa Pact and the "transition" to bourgeois democracy. A pact of silence about the crimes of Francoism was agreed: not one fascist has ever been brought to trial.

When the working class responded to the free-market policies

of PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González—elected in 1982—with the 1988 general strike, IU diverted the movement away from a struggle against the government. The PCE had founded IU in 1986, amid a popular campaign against NATO's presence in Spain, in an effort to turn workers away from a reckoning with the political and historical crimes of fascism, and towards bourgeois pacifism.

Since then, IU has functioned as a junior partner of the PSOE and an integral part of the political establishment. Its close support for the PSOE has seen its parliamentary group shrink from 21 seats in 1996 to only two today. Now that the PSOE is moving to implement the diktat of the banks, IU is preparing to follow along—as IU suggests in the conclusion of its congress document.

Calling for the formation of a "political formation of a new type," IU writes: "This reformation does not have the objective of the simple survival of a given political space. On the contrary. The central objective of the IU reformation is to convert ourselves into an organization with useful and viable proposals for social transformation."

This only begs the question: what "viable" social transformation exists, on the basis of political subordination to social democracy and the European Union? None, save huge social cuts that will devastate the working class.

IU adds that this shift is "already irreversible. Inside *Izquierda Unida* we are totally committed to bringing it to a successful conclusion." The goal, IU explains, is to "build an organization in which we must coexist and work together with various sectors of the anti-capitalist left: ecologists, communists, socialists, republicans and left nationalists."

The fact that IU feels obliged to abandon any remaining verbal loyalty it might have to socialism, as it orients itself to the PSOE and the European Union bureaucracy, is a sign of the massive right-wing shift it is preparing to make. Though it seeks to confuse the population with a politically androgynous "anti-capitalist" label, it will prove bitterly hostile to the working class.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact