

Spain: Local and regional elections show mass dissatisfaction

Alejandro López
25 May 2011

The ruling PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) has suffered its worst defeat in local and regional elections in history. It received 27.8 percent of the ballot—1.5 million votes less compared to the last elections in 2007—and has lost in all regional governments except one and all the main cities that were under its control (Seville, Barcelona, San Sebastian).

The right-wing Popular Party has been the main beneficiary of the collapse of the PSOE. This is not the result of mass support, as the PP only gained 6,000 more votes. It takes place against the background of mass popular protests against the austerity measures imposed by the PSOE government. As stated by one consultant Luis Arroyo, who in the past has worked for the PSOE, “The issue here isn’t that Spain has become more conservative, but rather that the Socialists have become less progressive”.

Since the second government of Prime Minister Zapatero came to power in 2008, it has imposed a €15 billion austerity programme, cutting civil servants’ wages by 5 to 15 percent, and raised the retirement age from 65 to 67. It has also imposed a labour reform that has destroyed workers’ protection with the assistance of the two main unions, Union General de los Trabajadores (UGT) and Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), and has pressured the regional governments to impose cuts as they control over one third of the total budget.

The resistance to these measures, along with soaring unemployment of 23 percent and a 43.5 percent rate among youth under 25, had been stifled by the trade unions and the ex-left parties, until the eruption of the May 15 Movement just one week before the elections. Tens of thousands took to the streets in cities across Spain, expressing the opposition of workers, youth and

unemployed. They have demonstrated in more than 162 cities, defied orders to disperse ahead of local and regional elections, and occupied the centre squares of the main cities.

The protests continued during the election, and the fear in ruling circles of igniting something larger kept the state security forces from intervening. After the elections the movement has continued, and currently protests are taking place in around 57 Spanish cities.

People are being urged to join what has become known as the “Spanish Revolution” through a YouTube video, which has gone viral attracting nearly 300,000 views in three days. As of May 23 the video ranks seventh in YouTube’s “most watched today”.

The main assemblies in Madrid and Barcelona have called a demonstration on June 19, and the Barcelona assembly will also take part in the June 15 demonstration against the Catalan government’s 10 percent cuts.

This discontent was evidenced in the election. One in 25 spoiled their ballots—representing 1 million blank and spoiled votes. This would make the protesters the fourth largest party. The elections have also shown abstention levels of 33.77 percent, with 45 percent abstaining in Catalonia.

As well as the PP, other beneficiaries of the collapse of the PSOE are also on the right. Voters representing a layer of the petty-bourgeoisie, which have traditionally looked to the PP with its origins in the Francoist National Movement, turned out for the Spanish Falange and Spanish Alternative, which gained 11,162 votes. Spain 2000 has entered the Valencian parliament with 14,000 votes, and the xenophobic Platform for Catalonia has gained 65,000 votes, rising from 17 town councillors in 2007 to 67 in 2011. For the first time it has a political presence in the “red belt” of Barcelona’s

working class neighbourhoods.

Bildu, a Basque separatist party, also benefited. The Supreme Court had banned the party for alleged links with the separatist group, ETA. After a last-minute reversal of that ban by the Constitutional Court, Bildu took 25 percent of the Basque vote, making it the second force. Under conditions where the working class needs to unite to struggle against the austerity measures, this is a retrograde development.

With the economic crisis growing, the international markets are questioning whether it will now be possible to impose the savage attacks being demanded on the working class. The FTSE 100 closed down almost 2 percent at 5,835.89 points, while the CAC 40 in Paris fell 2.1 percent to 3,906.98 after the defeat of the PSOE.

As David Jones, chief market strategist at IG Index stated, “What is clearly unnerving markets at the moment is just how unquantifiable the eurozone crisis still is”.

The *Financial Times* editorial on May 23 supported the PSOE’s cuts, stating, “Mr. Zapatero’s administration has done well, both in reining in public spending and in restructuring Spain’s ailing banking sector. He deserves another 10 months to push these programmes forward”.

It urged caution on the part of the Popular Party, insisting that it must back the PSOE and not seek an early election that would destabilize Spain. “The PP must now back Mr. Zapatero’s austerity drive”, it warned, citing the danger that the “vocal protest movement” will grow.

The PSOE and PP are presently left in charge of the situation, despite their crisis and lack of support, due to the absence of any alternative.

Izquierda Unida (United Left) is discredited and was only able to register a 1 percent increase in its vote, losing the only city it held, Córdoba. Cayo Lara, leader of the coalition of Stalinists, Greens and ex-left groups, was unsuccessful in his attempt to get the vote of the “los indignados” (the indignant ones).

Other forces that are leading some sectors of the protest around the anti-globalization petty-bourgeois milieu, such as ATTAC, have called for political abstention and to not take sides between the two main contesting parties. Instead, they are trying to lead the movement to a dead end that can only mean more cuts.

The Izquierda Anticapitalista, a section of the Pabloite International Secretariat of the Fourth International, has spearheaded this political betrayal.

Esther Vivas, leader of the Anticapitalists in Catalonia, stated, “The future of the 15M initiated movement is unpredictable. In the short term the first challenge is to continue to build on the existing camps, set them up in cities where they do not yet exist and ensure they continue at least until Sunday May 22.... It is necessary to also consider new dates for mobilization, in the wake of 15M, to maintain the rhythm. The main challenge is to maintain this simultaneous dynamic of expansion and radicalization of the protest which we have experienced in the last few days”.

The aim of the Anticapitalists is to burn out the movement by recommending constant mobilizations, while protecting the backs of the trade union bureaucracy and the Social Democrats.

The May 15 movement needs to create its own organisations of struggle, independent of the trade unions. Above all, a new political party must be built—on the basis of an uncompromising revolutionary and internationalist perspective. It is not merely a question of protest, but of building a new leadership to fight for the socialist transformation of the economy in Spain, throughout Europe and internationally.

As Trotsky warned the Spanish Left Opposition in 1931, “The spontaneity—which at the present stage constitutes the strength of the movement—may in the future become the source of its weakness. To assume that the movement can continue to be left to itself without a clear program, without its own leadership, would mean to assume a perspective of hopelessness. For the question involved is nothing less than the seizure of power”.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact