

Spain's United Left joins government, backs cuts in Andalucía

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After agreeing to form a coalition government with the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) government in Andalucía last week, the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU) has agreed to cuts in the regional budget.

The IU is a coalition of regionalist, republican, green and other petty-bourgeois forces hostile to the working class, led by the Communist Party (PCE).

IU regional leader Diego Valderas declared that he will “abide with cuts and fiscal consolidation due to a legal imperative” and that it was “necessary” that “loyalty, cordiality and good relations” exist between Andalucía and the Popular Party (PP) central government. (The legal imperative cited is the threat of intervention by the central government if regions refuse to comply with deficit reduction targets).

The new coalition is expected to cut around €2.7 billion of its €32 billion budget in order to reduce its deficit to 1.5 percent. However, the financial markets are putting pressure on it to carry out much deeper cuts, with the credit rating agency Standard & Poor's lowering the region's ratings from A to BBB last week.

The PSOE-supporting *El País* warned, “[T]his coalition is an opportunity for showing the degree of responsibility the left can exercise in the management of a critical situation. The two parties know that a great deal is at stake, and that they must make decisions contrary to the expectations of their voters.”

In exchange for their services, the new PSOE regional premier, José Antonio Griñan, will give the IU three departments. Valderas will be given the post of Councillor of Local Government and Institutional Relations, while two of his colleagues, Rafael Rodríguez and Elena Cortés, will be in charge of Tourism and Development respectively.

Valderas promised not to repeat what happened in Extremadura, where three regional IU deputies ignored

pleas from the IU federation to sell their seats to the PSOE, as has been the tradition, and abstained in the vote for regional premier—effectively handing power to the PP.

He has stated that he will not apply the latest labour reform on public sector workers, but has declined to say he will not impose the mass redundancies the reforms are intended to facilitate, and which are dictated by the austerity budget.

The IU held the balance of power in Andalucía after elections in March, which saw the PSOE lose control for the first time since the fall of the Franco regime. Nearly 40 percent of voters abstained. The PSOE lost 600,000 votes, ending up with 47 seats (down 9) whilst the right-wing Popular Party (PP), which lost 200,000 votes, gained three seats to 50. The IU doubled its number of seats from 6 to 12 (11.3 percent of the vote) but its total increase was around 110,000.

The PSOE has continued to lose support since its collapse in the last general elections in late 2011. Workers do not see the PSOE as an alternative to austerity. At the national level, the PSOE opened the way to the PP by implementing austerity measures valued at €15 billion, including cuts in workers' wages, a two-year increase in the pension age, and undermining job security by changing the labour laws.

In Andalucía the PSOE government has been implicated in the “Expediente de Regulación de Empleo (ERE) scandals”, which involve the use of public funds for early retirement plans in a number of private companies. It has overseen privatisations, deregulation and unemployment that reached 33 percent of the active population—1.3 million people.

The move by the leadership of the IU—with the wholehearted support of the Stalinist PCE—was resisted by sectors within the IU. But they did so only because

they wanted to support a minority PSOE government without entering a coalition so as to maintain an appearance of distance.

The Stalinists barred the IU affiliate, the CUT-BAI, headed by Sánchez Gordillo, from having a vote in the referendum because of problems “related to not paying its subscriptions”. The reality was that they did not want any opposition to their deal. The CUT-BAI is popular amongst the *jornaleros* (peasants without land), who have historically opposed the PSOE, which has done little to improve their social conditions.

Gordillo, a deputy in the Andalusian parliament, cast a null vote for the investiture of Griñan as a protest against the coalition. He fulfils an important political function within IU in giving it a left façade. As mayor of a small town, Marinaleda, he promoted the occupation of the large landowners and developed a “system based on self-builds” of houses, where each person could have a house on the condition that they paid €15 a month and built it themselves. One of CUT-BAI’s main policies is for Andalusian self-determination, claiming that being “the oldest civilization in Europe” the Andalusian nation “is entitled to its sovereignty”.

Under conditions where mass opposition is growing against the PP government’s austerity measures totalling over €50 billion, the IU is propping up the discredited social democrats. Another coalition government is already being benchmarked in the northern region of Asturias.



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