

# Spain's Popular Party makes U-turn on eviction petition

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22 February 2013

Last week, Spain's ruling Popular Party (PP) cynically executed an about-face over foreclosures and evictions. It voted in favour of a petition (Popular Legislative Initiative, ILP) in congress organised by the Mortgage Victims Platform (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, PAH).

The U-turn is a sign of the raging crisis in the PP in the face of mounting opposition to its rule.

The party is embroiled in a corruption scandal affecting top ranking members, including Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, against a backdrop of numerous ongoing strikes and protests against pay cuts, job losses and the destruction of public services.

The PAH was able to gather nearly 1.5 million signatures supporting the petition, which calls for a backdated halt to evictions, a new law involving "dation in payment" that will allow those who have had their homes foreclosed to cancel the mortgage by handing the property over to the bank, and the creation of a pool of social housing for those who are made homeless.

Under Spanish law, if an ILP gathers more than 500,000 signatures it has to be presented to congress within nine months and a decision made within 15 days. It is non-binding and does not guarantee it will become law.

Until last week the ILP looked as if it were going to be blocked by the PP, which possesses an absolute majority in congress. Until the last moment, PP officials stated that they would "politely say no" to it. The unexpected change came in the wake of a number of suicides involving people facing imminent eviction.

On the day of the debate in congress, a 56-year-old man facing imminent eviction took his own life in Basuria in the Basque Country, leaving a note to his children saying he "could not continue any longer." An

elderly couple on the island of Mallorca took their own lives after being informed by court that their house would be auctioned. The next day a 55-year-old man was found dead in his home in Alicante, the same day he was to be evicted for not paying the mortgage debt of €24,000 (US\$31,650).

According to PAH, an astronomical 400,000 evictions have taken place since the eruption of the economic crisis in 2008 and the collapse of Spain's housing bubble—equivalent to 517 a day. The Association of Bank and Savings Users (ADICAE) estimates that 53,272 families will lose their homes this year.

The exact number of suicides linked with evictions is unknown, as the state-run National Institute of Statistics stopped collecting the data after 2010 when the figure reached a record high of 3,145.

The massive support for the eviction ILP indicates that workers and youth are determined to resist the austerity onslaught being carried out by the major parties. At the weekend protests took place in 50 cities across Spain demanding the right to a decent home.

However, the ILP is another example of the extremely limited single-issue perspective being pursued by the pseudo-left based on putting pressure on the political representatives of the ruling class—all of which have demonstrated where their allegiances lie on the plight of workers and youth.

On the day of the discussion in congress, PAH leader and professor of Mercantile Law at the University of Girona, Martín Batllorí, stated, "Today, we will see if parliament is blind and deaf in the eyes of the people."

PAH spokeswoman and professor at the Observatory on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Ada Colau, added, "We are asking deputies not to show disrespect to the people."

Colau was one of the first organisers of PAH, which was supported by leaders of the M-15 indignados movement and Democracy Now (Democracia Real Ya). Last year, she gained media attention as the main representative and spokesperson of the PAH. On February 5, she personally defended the contents of the ILP, saying afterwards that the “dation in payment was a citizens’ victory and does not belong to any party.”

The PP, which the PAH met with prior to the vote in an effort to convince them to change their minds, has imposed one round of austerity after another, destroying the living standards of the working class. According to the latest statistics, one in five Spaniards is poor, over 20 million Spaniards, representing 43 percent of the population, earn less than €12,000 (US\$15,600) per year, unemployment stands at a record level of 26 percent and youth unemployment at 56 percent.

The opposition Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) supports the PAH initiative only in order to head off widespread anger with the government. It was the first to impose austerity, including cuts to public workers service salaries, pension reductions, and cuts to child benefits and many other welfare payments.

The initiative has also been supported by the United Left (IU) and the trade unions CCOO and UGT in an attempt to give them a left cover. However, the IU is currently in coalition government with the PSOE in Andalusia, where they are imposing a €1.5 billion austerity package. The unions have been involved in new negotiations with the government and the employers’ associations and have reached agreements that will drastically reduce salaries, worsen labour conditions and extend working hours.

No party has been a stronger cheerleader for the PAH initiative than the Pabloite Anticapitalist Left (Izquierda Anticapitalista, IA). In its main statement, “After the passing of the PAH’s ILP in Congress: Yes we can,” published on the February 14, the IA says it is “an important victory for this to be discussed [in Congress]. It has been a great success getting a huge social support reflected in the signatures collected: 1,400,000, nearly three times those needed for an ILP. The PP was determined to veto its passage, but social pressure forced them to rectify at the last moment. This shows that, as reflected by the screaming inside and outside Congress, Yes we can!”

Adopting as its own Barack Obama’s campaign slogan, IA attempts to portray the passing of an initiative as a victory, but says nothing about the experience with the previous law supposed to address evictions and the housing problem. Last November, the law passed by the PP was limited to a small number of those living in particularly precarious situations and only suspended the threat of eviction for two years. The law did not apply retrospectively and made no change to the requirement that those who lose their property still have repay their outstanding loans, usually at exorbitant rates of interest. The PP is expected to use its majority to water down the current initiative in the same way so as to make it meaningless.

The perspective of pressuring bourgeois parties to change has resulted in one defeat after another. For the pseudo-left parties, every minor action is considered a great success. A one-day general strike, the preventing of a family being evicted from their home, an announcement for a moratorium on certain evictions, a strike isolated by the unions, an occupation of a bank or the indignados’ plaza occupations, are all portrayed as an unbroken chain of victories even as they change nothing fundamentally.

The IA’s involvement in the PAH has nothing to do with raising the political consciousness of workers and youth for the overthrow of the profit system. With the PP in a state of crisis and workers increasingly turning away from the unions and the PSOE, the pseudo-lefts are intensifying their efforts to create illusions in these increasingly discredited organisations.



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