Spain: Polls show support for all parties, unions and monarchy at record low

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According to the latest polls, the main pillars of Spain's post Francoist democracy—the political parties, the trade unions and the monarchy—have seen a massive decline in support.

Despite the best efforts of the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), the Popular Party (PP), the Communist Party (PCE) and all of those who imposed the "pact of forgetting" and the "peaceful transition" to democracy, the unravelling of the post-Franco arrangements is gaining momentum. It can only mean huge social struggles are on the horizon that will dwarf what has happened so far.

The de facto two-party system involving the ruling PP and the opposition PSOE is collapsing. Their joint percentage of support fell from 84 percent in the 2008 elections to 73 percent in 2011. In January 2013, before the eruption of the recent corruption scandals that have embroiled the PP, PSOE and other parties, it went down to 65 percent.

In the last three months, their combined vote has plummeted to just half the electorate.

According to polling company Simple Lógica, the PP would obtain 31.2 percent of the vote if elections were held today. But the PSOE has not benefited at all from the growing unpopularity of the government. Instead support for the PSOE is an even lower 21.5 percent.

The approval rating for current PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is 18.2 percent, whilst that of PSOE leader Alfredo Perez Rubalcaba is a disastrous 10.9 percent.

The survey shows that only 48 percent of the electorate would vote for any party at all in general elections.

A recent survey by Metroscopia for the daily *El País* goes even further, indicating that support for the two parties is only 47 percent.

In both surveys, the PCE-led United Left (IU) and UPyD (a new party formed in the Basque Country in 2007 opposed to separatism and supporting a unitary Spanish state) would double their results to around 14-16 percent for IU and 11-14 percent for UPyD.

This massive drop in support for the two traditional parties reflects popular anger against the austerity measures and the massive pauperisation this has caused. (See "Reports reveal rapid pauperisation of the Spanish working class") Both parties have imposed one draconian austerity package after another, involving cuts in health care, education and social services and increases in taxes and utility bills.

The IU, even though it has doubled its results, has not been able to capitalise greatly from the PSOE's huge drop in support. Amongst IU voters, according to Simple Lógica, 38 percent disapprove of the role of IU leader Cayo Lara. This reflects the widely held view that the party is a servile and unprincipled junior partner of the PSOE and an integral part of the political establishment. In the Andalucian regional government the IU is in a coalition with the PSOE and helped impose €1.5 billion worth of cuts and increases in taxes of €1.2 billion.

The latest polls also show a significant reduction in support for the unions. The main trade unions, the PCE-led Workers Commissions (CCOO) and PSOE-aligned General Workers Union (UGT), were central pillars of the transition to democracy. They helped direct workers' demands for a thoroughgoing reckoning with fascism toward support for a bourgeois democracy based on collaboration with the employers and former fascists, many of whom found a new home in the PP.

The unions were able to extract concessions during the transition in return for demobilising the mass movement against Francoism. This period has long

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passed. They are an integral arm of the state, colluding in mass unemployment, wage cuts and new rules making it easier and cheaper to fire workers. In the space of two years, the PP government and its PSOE predecessor agreed to three labour “reforms” with the trade unions, which have significantly reduced labour costs.

This has led to mass dissatisfaction with the unions. In reply to the question: “How do you rate each of the following social platforms or organizations?” asked by the Observatorio polling, the unions received ratings of 5 percent “very good”, 13 percent “good”, 24 percent “satisfactory”, 19 percent “bad” and 34 percent “very bad”.

According to the UGT’s own figures, in the last two years the organization has lost 40,651 of its 1 million members. The CCOO ended 2012 with 5 percent fewer members (60,309) compared to the peak in 2009 (1,203,309). For the first time, the CCOO has held its annual congress in its own offices instead of a palatial conference hall and slashed the number of delegates. The union is also making 150 staff redundant.

Polls show that there is record-low support for the monarchy, which is engulfed in corruption scandals. A general feeling of hatred toward privilege while the mass of the population is suffering enormous hardship was heightened last year as a result of the revelations that King Juan Carlos had not broken his hip while working hard in his office, as originally claimed, but during an elephant shoot on a secret luxury African safari. His daughter and son-in-law are facing fraud charges for siphoning off money from a charitable foundation in which they were involved.

The monarchy represents another pillar of the transition. In 1969, Franco appointed then-prince Juan Carlos as his heir apparent and closely supervised his training. When the dictator died in 1975, the PSOE and PCE helped resuscitate the discredited monarchy. After the attempted military coup in 1981, the myth that Juan Carlos had personally intervened to prevent it was cultivated by the media, school textbooks, the trade unions, a number of historians and all the main political parties.

In the last three months, polls by Metroscopia show that the king’s popularity rating has fallen from a positive 21 points to a negative 11 (among those aged 18-34 the figure was minus 41). He polled below 27 other social institutions, including tax inspectors. Such a rapid fall from favour has no doubt been responsible for the ending of official polls by the publicly funded Centre of Sociological Research in 2011, when for the first time the monarchy’s popularity fell below 5, achieving 4.89 out of 10.

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