

Spain: United Left ends differences with PSOE in Andalucía coalition

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The Communist Party (PCE)-led United Left (IU) has reaffirmed its commitment to the coalition government with the Socialist Party (PSOE) in the Spanish region of Andalucía. The government nearly collapsed in mid-April following an IU publicity stunt related to evictions, but both parties have formed a liaison committee to end their differences.

Andalucía has been ruled by the PSOE since 1982, but in the 2012 regional elections the right-wing Popular Party (PP) won more seats than the PSOE as a result of the PSOE's austerity measures and corruption scandals. In order to prevent the PP taking power the PSOE formed a coalition with IU, which was put in charge of the public works and housing department and overseen by IU member Elena Cortés.

The crisis was sparked when 14 homeless families, who had been squatting in an empty, bank-owned Seville apartment block, Corrala Utopia, were evicted by a large contingent of police on April 6.

Corrala Utopia had become highly symbolic, featured in newspapers such as the *New York Times* and TV networks such as Al-Jazeera, and receiving an award from the Human Rights Association of Andalucía. It was the first in a growing network of previously vacant properties in Seville occupied by victims of the global economic crisis. Since the financial crisis hit Spain in 2008, there have been hundreds of thousands of forced evictions. Spanish banks have about €100 billion (\$139 billion) of repossessed real estate properties on their books. Macarena, the district of Seville in which Corrala Utopía stands, had the highest eviction rate in the city, which has an estimated 130,000 homes lying empty.

The demise of Corrala Utopia is also further proof of the bankruptcy of the policy pursued by the Movement of Mortgage Victims (Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca, PAH), which had become the main opposition to evictions and organised squats. It was formed in 2009 on the basis that sufficient pressure would force the PP government to change the eviction laws. But, after an anti-eviction petition which received 1.5 million signatures—indicating the huge

opposition to evictions in Spain—was presented to Congress, the PP introduced a new law that was so narrow that only a very small proportion of those facing eviction were covered. After the petition failed, the PAH sowed illusions in a judgment by the European Court of Justice, whose only criticism was that the speed of evictions violated European Union consumer protection laws.

The PAH has been supported by the IU and opposition to evictions has formed a major plank in the party's national, regional and local election programmes.

Holding the IU to its election promises, the evicted families camped out in front of Seville City Hall in protest. A day after, in a highly publicised event, Elena Cortés as head of the public works and housing department began handing out keys to temporary subsidised housing to the squatter families. The IU coordinator in Andalucía, Antonio Maíllo, also took part in the photo opportunity.

IU's national general coordinator, Cayo Lara said, "The public works department has acted following the strict letter of the law—not only with the rehousing, but also with all of its actions to protect people who are suffering because of evictions. There has been a scrupulous respect for legality, one that has never before been seen in the history of the region."

However, the IU's coalition partner PSOE said that such actions would encourage the other 12,000 homeless families to become more radical in order to bypass official waiting lists for public housing. One PSOE leader said, "Andalucía is not Venezuela, and we can't let anyone who bangs on the door just walk away with a new house."

The regional PSOE premier Susana Díaz passed a decree to take away IU's control of housing saying, "I announced that I was going to do it and that is what I did... The principle of equality needs to be respected, and this is compatible with people who are on the waiting lists." She also said the action threatened the region's stability and undermines the government's efforts to promote Andalucía as a safe region in which to invest.

After 48 hours of negotiations leading to an agreement,

Diaz returned control of the public works department to IU. Sources from both parties told the media that the PSOE-IU alliance “would not withstand” another similar crisis. The new liaison committee was created comprising Diaz’s advisor Manuel Jiménez Barrios (PSOE), deputy premier Diego Valderas (IU), PSOE secretary Juan Cornejo, IU coordinator Antonio Maíllo, and parliamentary speakers of both formations, Mario Jiménez (PSOE) and José Antonio Castro (IU). It was also decided to investigate if the evicted families were really entitled to public housing under “social exclusion” guidelines. To ensure IU does not waver in its commitment Diaz has since talked about holding early elections before the end of the present term in March 2016.

The IU’s actions were a publicity stunt aimed at saving face for a coalition which has imposed savage austerity measures. Over the last two years it has slashed the regional budget by €2.6 billion, including 10.8 percent in health care and 8.6 percent in education. On top of this, the PSOE is currently being investigated for allegations of organising fake redundancy payments totaling hundreds of millions of euros of public money, and for €17 million of European Union grants for retraining the unemployed, which have gone missing. In Extremadura, IU is propping up the PP regional government, which has cut the health care budget by 22 percent since 2011.

Both regions have suffered the full effects of the economic crisis and austerity measures. According to Eurostat, the five worst unemployment black spots are all in Spain, and the worst of them all is Andalucía, where 1 in 3 people is out of work. In Extremadura there are 160,000 unemployed, nearly 20 percent of families have none of their members working and the poverty level is 34 percent.

Publicity stunts are nothing new for IU. In 2012 the supermarket raids and land occupations carried out by the trade union leader, mayor of Marinaleda and Andalusian IU deputy, Juan Manuel Sánchez Gordillo, hit the international headlines.

The stunts not only have the important political function of providing a left façade whilst the IU imposes savage austerity measures. They also serve as a lifeline for its pseudo-left hangers-on, who leap on such actions as proof the IU can be pressured.

The Morenoite party, Corriente Roja, declared that the temporary relocation of the families of Corrala Utopia shows that “yes we can!”—a chant used by PAH—and that “if Susana Díaz and the [regional] government do not solve this serious social problem [of evictions], Izquierda Unida will have to choose: with Susana and the bankers within the government, or with the evicted families.”

El Militante (the Militant), the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, echoed the slogan “yes

we can” before declaring, “now that the leaders of the PSOE have made clear the real interests that they defend, we cannot accept one more minute of being accomplices of the path of self-destruction they are heading towards. IU has to be on the streets with the working class [...] We need IU to organise workers and to struggle to expropriate housing from the banks and big business.” El Militante concluded by declaring that the IU has “to play its role of mobilising and contributing to organise an authentic social rebellion [...] with the objective of creating a left government which will nationalise the main pillars of the economy.”

Workers should be warned that these tendencies do not simply uphold a wrong policy regarding IU. Their role is to confuse workers as to the real nature of IU and its leading component, the PCE. The PCE has always come to the rescue of Spanish capitalism in its hour of need. To suggest that it will now “organise an authentic social rebellion” is to deny history.

Within bourgeois circles the IU is being warned that its stunts threaten Spain’s stability and undermine its own future prospects. *El País* said the dispute could have “been handled in a more serene, constructive manner” and, “Now that we are so very close to municipal elections in which it is likely that political deals will be necessary to form local governments, what message would the Socialist Party and IU be sending out if they cut their cooperation short in the middle of the term?”

It concluded by stating that “partisan calculations should not take precedence here. The main thing to keep in mind is that neither Andalucía nor Spain, both of which are struggling to emerge from a devastating crisis, can afford these episodes of political instability.”



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