

Spain's major parties hammered in European elections

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The European elections results in Spain represent a decisive rejection of austerity by the majority of voters.

The ruling right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the opposition Socialist Party (PSOE) both had their worst results since the first elections in post-Franco Spain in 1977. Their combined vote plummeted to less than 50 percent compared to 80 percent in the 2009 European elections.

The PP lost 2.6 million votes and eight seats, and was forced to cancel celebrations at its national headquarters, fearing its sympathisers would not turn up. The result was an indictment of the PP's austerity policies, which have seen over 40 billion euros in budget cuts since its election in 2011, with unemployment reaching 26 percent. The party is also embroiled in court proceedings, which allege that a secret slush fund, operating since 1990, funnelled undeclared cash donations from big business backers to senior members of the party, including the current Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

The PSOE, thanks to its own record in government and its failure to mount any opposition to the PP, slumped to 24 percent, losing 2.5 million votes and nine seats.

The party was incapable of posing as an alternative to the PP, having itself opened the door to austerity in May 2010 when the government of Jose Luis Rodríguez Zapatero imposed the largest austerity package since the death of General Franco. After that it continued its attacks, imposing two labour reforms, pensions cuts and wage cuts on civil servants.

After the results, PSOE General Secretary Alfredo Pérez Rubalcaba announced his resignation, declaring, "It is obvious that we have not managed to recover the confidence of the people [...] We have to assume the political responsibilities." He announced there would be a meeting in July to find his successor.

The fate of the PSOE is by no means unique. Rather, it is shared by its counterparts in Greece and Ireland, where

austerity measures have been most savage and where the social democrats have been tested to destruction. The Pan-Hellenic Socialist Movement (Pasok), secured just 8 percent of the vote thanks to its coalition with New Democracy, while its former partners, the Democratic Left (DIMAR), came bottom of all the major parties with 1.2 percent. Like Rubalcaba, its leader, Fotis Kouvelis, has resigned. Joining them in the political wilderness is Eamon Gilmore of the Labour Party in Ireland, who has been deputy prime minister in the coalition with Fine Gael. Labour's vote fell from 19 percent in the 2011 general election to just 7 percent.

The main beneficiaries of the hostility to the PP and PSOE are the United Left (IU), a coalition of middle-class parties including regionalist and ecologist groups dominated by the Communist Party (PCE), and the newly created Podemos (We Can) party.

IU became the third force in Spain's delegation to the European parliament, securing just under 10 percent of the vote (six seats) and trebling its 1.5 million votes in 2009. This was despite its collaboration with the PSOE in the regional government of Andalusia, where the budget has been cut by €2.6 billion over the last two years, including 10.8 percent in health care and 8.6 percent in education.

Podemos came from nowhere to become the fourth largest political force, securing 1.2 million votes (eight percent). It is a creation of Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-capitalist Left), which has its roots in the 1953 split from the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. The International Committee of the Fourth International was established to defend Marxism in 1953 against this tendency, which abandoned the struggle to build independent revolutionary parties in favour of acting as apologists for the existing mass reformist and Stalinist parties, and liquidated section after section of the Trotskyist movement around the world.

IA's Podemos project is part of an international regroupment of pseudo-left groups and high-profile individuals, with the aim of preventing a rebellion by the working class against the social democratic parties and the trade union bureaucracy and channelling discontent into supposedly radical, but pro-capitalist formations.

In Spain, the high profile individual is political science professor, Pablo Iglesias, who constantly attacked "la casta" (the political caste).

"La casta", of course, recognise that the demagoguery employed by Iglesias plays a vital role in diverting opposition to austerity into safe channels. He was feted during the election campaign, receiving favourable media attention and participating in debates in all the major media outlets.

The Podemos "earthquake" was hailed by the *Financial Times* as a "catalyst for reform" against the "ossified hierarchs" of the PP and PSOE.

After the election Iglesias made clear that Podemos offered no independent perspective for the working class, declaring, "This is not a symbolic result for us. We are going to begin a period of convergence with other political forces. The big parties have suffered the biggest blow, with both taking less than 50 percent of the vote. But we will not have achieved our goal until we beat them."

This was a reference to joining forces with IU. Leading figures of both parties have already declared their intention to hold talks about their participation in the Spanish parliamentary election in 2015, which could result in Podemos becoming the power-brokers in local and regional governments. Leading Pabloite Jaime Pastor wrote that the results will mean for IU "the start of a process of meditation on the need for convergence" with Podemos.

IU leader and Congress deputy Alberto Garzón stated that although "our strategy, discourse and communication is different," the possibility of an agreement was "without a doubt".

The pseudo-left parties that orbit around IU and Podemos have also called for a front between the two organisations. En Lucha, sister party of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and involved in the Podemos project, spoke of a "passionate scenario with the possibility of working with mass organizations" [i.e., IU and the union bureaucracy]. El Militante (the Militant), the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, describes how the joint votes of IU and Podemos "represent 18 percent. In Madrid and other cities

and regions, the percentage of these forces are superior to that of the PSOE. [...] these elections are, without a doubt of great significance for the left."

In Catalonia and the Basque Country separatist parties were the main beneficiaries of the opposition to austerity. In Catalonia, where the voter turnout increased by 10 points in the lead up to a referendum on independence in September, the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) became the dominant political force in the region—for the first time since the period of the Second Republic (1931-1939)—overtaking the ruling Convergence and Union (CiU) party. "The People Decide" coalition, made up of separatist parties in the Basque Country, Navarre and Galicia, obtained nearly a third of a million votes, giving them one seat in the European Parliament.

Other beneficiaries of the elections have been Unión Progreso y Democracia (UpyD) with a million votes (four seats) and Cuitadans (Citizens) with half a million (two seats). Both parties focused their campaign on attacking the separatist project in Catalonia and defending the "unity of Spain". This meant that the new far-right wing party VOX created by former members of the PP, which made the defence of Spain against separatism its main axis in the campaign, were incapable of obtaining one deputy, winning only 244,000 votes.

Within 48 hours of the elections the International Monetary Fund presented its latest proposals for Spain, indicating that this institution, along with the European Central Bank and the European Commission, not last Sunday's elections, will decide the fate of workers.



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