

Spain: Pseudo-left Podemos party presents “a programme for the country’s salvation”

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In January 2013 Alexis Tsipras, leader of the SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left), the largest opposition party in Greece, stated at the Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, “I hope I’ve convinced you that I’m not as dangerous as some people think I am”.

Following closely in Tsipras’s footsteps is Pablo Iglesias, leader of Spain’s Podemos (We Can) party, created in January on a programme of vaguely reformist demands by Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-capitalist Left, IA), as part of an international regroupment of pseudo-left groups.

The IA is affiliated with the United Secretariat, which split from the Fourth International in 1953 and abandoned the struggle to build independent revolutionary parties in favour of acting as left apologists for the social democratic and Stalinist parties, such as the Communist Party-led United Left (IU). While IA broke organisationally from the IU in 2008 in order to distance itself politically from the discredited Socialist Party (PSOE), its essential political aim remains the same.

In May’s elections to the European Parliament, Podemos secured 1.25 million votes (8 percent) and five seats, with IA leader, Teresa Rodríguez, becoming the party’s number two MEP (Member of European Parliament).

At the same time, support collapsed for the two major parties that have dominated Spanish politics for the last 40 years. The ruling Popular Party (PP) lost 2.6 million votes and eight seats, whilst the PSOE lost 2.5 million votes. For the first time the combined vote of the two parties plummeted to less than 50 percent, down from 80 percent in the 2009 European elections, demonstrating the hostility to the austerity measures both have carried out at national, regional and local

level.

Soon after his election, Iglesias prostrated himself before the Spanish ruling class in the five-star Ritz hotel in Madrid at a breakfast organised by Nueva Economía de España, a debating forum sponsored by major companies including Asisa, BT and Red Eléctrica de España.

One newspaper described how, before a “hundred businessmen and attentive CEOs in ties”, Iglesias made clear that he “did not come to the Ritz to steal the ladies’ minks and the gentleman’s watches”. Rather, he declared, he had come to present the “programme for the country’s salvation”.

Iglesias explained that the economic crisis was the result of “the avarice of the banks, with the aid of the ratings agencies and the IMF [International Monetary Fund]”. He complained that “the ECB [European Central Bank], which controls the money that is the basis of sovereignty, is not under democratic control”.

This is a key aspect of the programme of Podemos. It promotes the illusion that the big business European Union (EU) bloc, which has imposed mass poverty and unemployment across the continent, can be reformed by “refounding” and “democratising” the ECB.

Iglesias went on a nationalist rant, which any far-right leader in Europe would have been proud of. He accused the “caste”, by which the pseudo-left mean the PSOE and PP, for having “sold our country” and relegating Spain to “a position on the periphery, into an indebted country which provides cheap labour to the north of Europe”.

Iglesias then described himself as a “patriot”, adding, “I don’t like seeing United States bases on Spanish soil. The only ones that I like seeing in my country are Spanish”. Patriotism “has nothing to do with left or right”, he went on, but was a question of “loving your

people and defending your country”.

Iglesias is praising Spain’s armed forces whose bloody history consists of a coup that sparked off the bloody Spanish Civil War and the mainstay of the fascist regime that followed in the 1930s. The Spanish army has also participated in all the military adventures of US imperialism over the last 25 years.

Behind Iglesias’ anti-Americanism is not socialist opposition to US imperialism. Rather, under conditions where US power is diminishing and voices within sections of the European elite are calling for more independence from Washington, Iglesias is bolstering European and especially Spanish imperialism.

Podemos remained silent throughout the Ukraine crisis when the EU powers, in league with Washington, engineered a fascist-backed coup in Kiev as part of their provocations against Russia.

Iglesias’s nationalist demagoguery has nothing to do with upholding workers’ rights. Spain provides cheap labour, not to “northern Europe”, but to capitalists in Spain and Europe. The attempt to portray the situation in Europe as one between north and south is deliberately divisive and aids big business. In Germany, which Iglesias is alluding to, the working class is also suffering the effects of austerity, with 7.1 million people in part-time work and a further 4.8 million underemployed in so-called “mini jobs”.

The leader of Podemos ended his speech at the Ritz with friendly advice to his audience to “respect the law and pay taxes”.

In the aftermath of the European elections, the PP and right-wing media initiated a campaign to discredit Podemos, accusing it of supporting the Basque separatist Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) and receiving funds from the “leftist” Venezuelan government.

However, José Antonio Monago, the PP president in the Extremadura autonomous region, distanced himself from his party, stating that Podemos “merits respect”, adding that “I am ready to talk to anyone. I am not a dogmatic person”.

Monago is very conscious of the role the pseudo-left forces play. He has been able to rule Extremadura thanks to a de facto alliance with IU, imposing €250 million in cuts in the region’s public health care, €25 million in social services, and the “harshest cuts” in public education in the region’s history.

Podemos aims to occupy the vacuum left by the

collapse of the establishment parties to prevent growing social opposition from developing into a conscious political movement threatening capitalism. The pseudo-left groups that have flocked to Podemos and its right-wing programme bear a major responsibility for the betrayal that is underway.

IA remains one of Podemos’s main components and the public utterances of Rodríguez are indistinguishable from those of Iglesias. El Militante (the Militant), the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, calls for a “left front” of IU and Podemos for the next general elections. The Morenoite tendency Corriente Roja and the former Morenoite Clase contra Clase have remained silent.

Most hypocritical are the musings of Manel Barriere Figueroa from En Lucha (sister party to the British Socialist Workers Party), who is also a member of a Podemos circle, or local assembly. He warns of the possibility of Iglesias becoming another bourgeois politician like Lula in Brazil, but this can be prevented if “we believe that only us from below can change things”.



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