

Spain: United Left and Podemos seek to join forces

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The United Left (IU), a conglomerate of middle-class parties led by the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), and the new middle-class party, Podemos, have opened talks with the aim of joining forces for the next general elections in 2015. These talks expose the role of Podemos as an operation aimed at re-branding IU and giving it a refurbished left face, under conditions where these forces have shifted to the right.

In the aftermath of the May European elections, IU's highest body, the Federal Political Council, decided to include younger members who are close to Podemos in the IU leadership. The most important of these is Alberto Garzón (28), an economist, who became one of the main spokespersons of the Indignados protest movement. After the eruption of the movement in 2011, he was co-opted into top positions by the IU within the space of six months. The Federal Political Council is also nominating Garzón as IU spokesman and in charge of the project aimed at “creating a political and social bloc ... with political forces susceptible to converge with IU.”

Garzón is a personal friend of Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias (35), a member of the PCE youth movement for six years. He has spoken of the need for a “popular front” because it “would maintain the independence of the organizations who would want to join, and at the same time would facilitate the joint participation in a scenario where we have to call for bold proposals, since the electoral law will penalize us.”

Also promoted to the leadership is the current IU deputy in the Madrid regional assembly, Tania Sánchez, who is Iglesias's partner.

The head of the Podemos European elections campaign, the political scientist Iñigo Errejón, said that joining forces “is becoming easier, because even though we come each from a different family, we agree

on the essentials.”

The “essentials” that both parties share is their hostility to any independent movement of the working class.

The capitalist crisis and the austerity measures pursued by the Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE) have led to a widespread impoverishment of Spanish workers and youth. A quarter of the working population (over half of young people) cannot find a job. Inequality has grown more in Spain between 2007 and 2011 than in any other EU member country, with the 20 richest people holding 77 billion euros--equivalent to the income of 20 percent of the population. Broad masses of workers now see both parties as instruments of the financial aristocracy.

Under these conditions a “popular front” is being proposed in order to prevent growing social opposition from developing into a conscious political movement that will threaten capitalism.

IU and Podemos hope to restore political legitimacy to the post-Franco political framework, under conditions where the main mechanisms through which it has been able to survive after 1978 are crumbling. The latest poll shows a historic low for voter support of both major parties, now standing at just over 50 percent, with the PP at 30 percent and the PSOE at 21 percent.

King Juan Carlos resigned earlier this year amid growing social tensions, corruption scandals and a collapse in public support for the monarchy. The unions, the main mechanism through which the cuts, labour law and pension reforms have been imposed, are vastly reduced forces. Only 15 percent of the workforce is now affiliated to a union, of which most are between the ages 45 to 54.

Podemos has been able to exploit the vacuum left by

the bankruptcy of IU and the PSOE, aided by the media's non-stop promotion. However, it offers no alternative to the establishment parties.

With the aid of Podemos, the Stalinist-led IU hopes to restore its own dwindling influence. In Andalusia, the IU is in a regional coalition government with the PSOE and has cut the budget by €2.6 billion over the last two years. In the region of Extremadura, it is supporting a right-wing PP government that is carrying out devastating austerity measures in the region.

Podemos makes great show of populist appeals against bureaucracy, corruption and monopolies, but over a quarter of its voters define themselves as upper class and middle class.

Since its founding last January by the Pabloite Izquierda Anticapitalista and dozens of academics, the party junked its initial reformist demands in favour of a programme for the European elections more acceptable to the ruling class. In the aftermath, Podemos has shifted further to the right, with its leader presenting a programme for “national salvation” at the Madrid's Ritz Hotel in front of hundreds of businessmen and CEOs.

The latest polls show Podemos could become the third force in Spain, overtaking IU. Since the party began subscriptions for membership on July 28, over 86,000 have joined. The only requirement is to put one's name, surname, passport or identification card, address and email address, after which one receives a code that allows one to vote as a member.

Tensions are rising within the so-called “circles”--the local party organs open to anyone, which can formally introduce and debate proposals for the party--between workers and the *de facto* leadership consisting of activists and members of pseudo-left parties.

The reporter Mathew Bennet, described a “circle” meeting in Murcia, which had around 150 attendees: “National leaders Pablo Iglesias and Iñigo Errejón got some praise for a job well done so far but members were very wary,” he writes. “One woman said 'Don't let them take the piss! If Podemos is just Pablo Iglesias, I'm leaving!' to general applause.”

The main focus of Podemos in the past months is corruption, backing the Villarejo directive in the European Parliament, which blames the economic crisis on corruption, as if it was not intrinsic to the profit system.

Podemos has targeted civil servants. One of the

popular proposals by a “circle” describes civil servants as “accommodated in their work places without having advanced in their knowledge.” It calls for appraisals every 5 to 7 years. If workers failed, they would have to submit to training courses. Some party members went as far as calling for redundancies.

Podemos is also debating on whether to create a new trade union. In the context of complete alienation of the majority of workers from the two main unions, CCOO and UGT, one of the circles, “Podemos trade unionists,” proposed a “new trade union model using the fresh air Podemos has brought into politics to create a new union based on the same model.”

This is in reality a call for establishing new labour agencies to serve the corporate-financial elite and the state, which will impose wage cuts and austerity measures, led by upper-middle-class academics and pseudo-left activists. A Podemos union, like the party, would be another attempt to re-brand the old organisations in order to impose a straitjacket on the working class.



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