

Podemos party tops opinion poll in Spain

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The nine-month-old pseudo-left party Podemos (We Can) is now the leading political force in Spain, according to the latest poll carried out by the daily *El País*.

If general elections were held today, 27 percent of Spaniards would vote for Podemos, 25.5 percent for the Socialist Party (PSOE) and 20 percent for the governing Popular Party (PP) led by Mariano Rajoy. In the 2009 European elections, the PSOE and PP together polled 80 percent of the vote.

The polling success for Podemos is a sign of the volatile political situation in Spain and the collapse in support for the establishment parties through which the class struggle was suppressed for decades after the transition from the fascist regime of General Francisco Franco to bourgeois democracy in 1978.

It is also clear that the ruling elite is acutely aware of the consequences of six years of social counterrevolution since the eruption of the global capitalist crisis that has led to mass unemployment and widespread poverty. Of paramount concern is the need to halt the rebellion by the working class against the traditional safety valves—the PSOE, the United Left (IU) and the trade union bureaucracy—and prevent the development of an independent movement. That the ruling elite wants Podemos to fill this role is indicated by the blanket media coverage the party has received over recent months.

Podemos was created in January to fill the vacuum left by the collapse of the major parties by Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anti-capitalist Left, IA). The IA has its roots in the 1953 split from the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, who abandoned the struggle to build independent revolutionary parties in favour of acting as advocates for the existing mass reformist and Stalinist parties, and who liquidated section after section of the Trotskyist movement around the world.

TV presenter and academic Pablo Iglesias was installed as the “public face” of Podemos. He was a former member of the Communist Party’s (PCE) youth movement and remained close to the PCE-led IU. Iglesias

specialised in populist denunciations of the “caste” (the establishment parties).

The new party’s programme consists of left-sounding “anti-capitalist” demands, including the “nationalisation of private banking”, the “socialisation” of top companies, “tackling” fraud and corruption, support for Catalan independence, the “rejection of military interventions, an exit from NATO and a firm defence of solidarity relations with other peoples”. Great emphasis was placed on the creation of a “citizens debt audit ... to determine which parts [of Spain’s national debt] are legitimate; the illegitimate debt will not be paid.”

No sooner had these vague demands been announced, than the party began modifying or abandoning them. Opposition to the “caste” became willingness “to talk to the PSOE and to the PP, because responsibility to the state moves us. ... We are not sectarian. On programmatic issues, we will not have problems with anyone.”

Iglesias has declared himself a “patriot” and stated that if it was necessary to increase the military budget “I would do it.” In August, the Podemos branch inside the army declared, “The army is necessary today, and we do not want to get into the anti-militarist debate” and refused to join the annual protest outside the US-NATO base at Rota on October 13, claiming jobs would be lost if it closed. 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.

Questioned as to his party’s position over the US-led imperialist intervention in Iraq and Syria, to which Spain has sent 300 soldiers, Iglesias declared, “Spain should have a serious and responsible foreign policy, and should not respond to impressionistic calls [by the US].”

Iglesias’s remarks have nothing to do with a socialist opposition to imperialism but, rather, mirror the recommendations made in a recent report, “Towards a Strategic Renewal of Spanish Foreign Policy,” by Spain’s state-financed think-tank, Instituto Elcano, that the country’s “loyal participation within the EU does not

mean Spain has to renounce thinking and acting for itself’.

PP officials have also recognised the role being played by Podemos, including José Monago, regional President of Extremadura, who earlier in the year called for “respect” to be shown to the party and is now calling for agreements with it. He has first-hand knowledge of the anti-working class and opportunistic nature of the pseudo-left, having carried out unprecedented cuts as a result of the support given to the PP by the regional IU.

Last month, at its founding congress, Podemos moved even further to the right. The central demand for a “citizens’ audit” was dropped, with the declaration that “the goal is not to not pay the debt [. ...] We can try to promote an orderly debt restructuring process in Europe and especially in the peripheral countries [. ...] It’s not a matter of will, or even of social equity (although it is that, too); it’s primarily about economic efficiency.”

Days before the congress, an anonymous source from the leadership told *El Confidencial Digital* that “Spain will have to pay the debt that corresponds to her” and to have said the opposite during the EU elections was “nonsense.”

Iglesias also told his team of economists to “remake completely” the economic programme presented in the EU election manifesto in order to present a “serious alternative” for the general elections.

In addition, the congress renounced its demands for a 35-hour work-week and retirement at 60-years-old, and replaced its earlier demand for a universal basic rent with a “social integration” rent, i.e., a subsidy for the lowest incomes—a subsidy which already, in fact, exists.

In May, the manifesto called for the elimination of subsidies for private education and greater support for free public education and students from poorer families. At the congress, however, these demands were replaced with calls for the suspension of the latest education law that has increased privatisation of education; rather, it maintains the status quo while including vague proposals for “more scholarships” and “the study of new models of financing the university system that prioritise public finance”.

The congress also renounced its previous “horizontalist” structure, with decisions being made at local assemblies, influenced by the *indignados* protest movement that erupted in May 2011. In its origin, “horizontalism” was the main mechanism through which the pseudo-left parties like IA and En Lucha (sister party to the Socialist Workers party in Britain) promoted a

political practice devoid of parties, principles, or perspective, reducing all questions to the lowest common denominator of middle-class activism and protest politics within the organization. Now the party has voted for a centralized and bureaucratic structure and a greatly reduced role for the local assemblies.

Having fulfilled the role of creating the Frankenstein monster called Podemos, the IA is now threatened with losing its top leadership positions and expulsion from the party, due to a new rule banning double membership introduced by Iglesias, whose faction gained majority control at the congress after winning 80 percent of the vote. The IA’s candidate Pablo Echenique was only able to muster 12 percent.

Whipped into line by the humiliating defeat of IA’s candidate, and omitting any reference to the pro-capitalist programme adopted by the congress, IA leader Miguel Urban, who was responsible for organising Podemos’ intervention in the EU elections, proceeded to prostrate himself before Iglesias and his cronies. He lamented in *Público*, the “misunderstanding and differences” that had arisen, insisting “Today our project and our loyalty is with Podemos.”

En Lucha justifies its own subservience to such a thoroughly bankrupt anti-working class organisation with the claim that “notwithstanding everything, Podemos is one of the most democratic organisations that exist in the Spanish state ... more than enough reason to not step aside but walk ten steps forward as [IA leader and Podemos MEP] Teresa Rodriguez said, and still be part of this process, which can struggle to become an organisation of rupture and change.”



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