

Syriza government's surrender to the EU in Greece exposes Podemos in Spain

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Of all the pseudo-left parties whose empty rhetoric has been punctured by the capitulation of Greece's Syriza government to the banks, none is more thoroughly exposed than Podemos in Spain.

Podemos was put together last year by the petty-bourgeois Anti-capitalist Left (IA) group and a cabal of Stalinist academics from Madrid's Complutense University, led by 36-year-old professor and TV pundit Pablo Iglesias. The group openly modeled itself on Syriza and sought out alliances with it. Profiting from the discrediting of the pro-austerity conservative and social-democratic parties in Spain, as Syriza had in Greece, Podemos now polls around 25 percent. It hopes to form a government after elections in November.

Syriza's record shows what a Podemos government would be in Spain: a servant of imperialism, working with openly right-wing forces to attack the working class.

The Podemos leadership is already applauding Syriza's attacks on workers in Greece. On February 20, Syriza signed an agreement with the EU, repudiating its pledges to end austerity and abolish the EU austerity Memorandum. Four days after this capitulation, Syriza announced plans for new budget cuts, privatizations, health care cuts and increases in the effective retirement age.

Iglesias grotesquely praised Syriza's abject surrender to the EU as proof of its fighting spirit. "There's something we can celebrate. Finally, there's a government from Southern Europe that negotiates and doesn't kneel and obey... Luckily, they have arrived at an agreement, a reasonable agreement, that will allow them to govern in peace," he told *Telecinco News*.

Iglesias' support for attacks on the working class in Greece is the logical conclusion of Podemos' support for Syriza over an entire period leading up to the January 25 Greek elections.

Syriza leader and now Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras has worked closely and publicly with Iglesias for months. The two met in Athens last July to formally coordinate the activities of their parties with a view to forming "left" governments in both countries. They met again in October to launch an "Alliance for political change." At the event, Iglesias called Syriza "the natural ally of Podemos in Greece," and Tsipras gushed that "Podemos can convert itself into another Syriza for Europe, the Spanish Syriza."

When it held its founding congress and elected a leadership in November, Podemos received accolades not only from Tsipras, who attended the event, but from the voice of European finance capital, the *Financial Times* of London. In "Radical left is right about Europe's debt," columnist Wolfgang Munchau endorsed Podemos' financial policy: "The establishment fears that this agenda will turn the country into a European version of Venezuela. But there is nothing controversial about the statement that if debt is unsustainable, it needs to be restructured."

In January, leading Podemos figures including IA's Teresa Rodríguez, who sits in the European parliament for Podemos and is the party's candidate for Sunday's elections in the southern region of Andalusia,

signed a manifesto calling for a Syriza vote. It was necessary, she declared, to prevent "democracy from being defeated by the markets... We are convinced that the Greek people will use the ballot box to throw out the thieves."

The mutual love fest culminated in Iglesias' attendance at Syriza's January 22 election rally, where he held hands with Tsipras in front of Syriza supporters chanting, "Syriza, Podemos, we will win." Iglesias said, "Winds of democratic change are blowing. The change in Greece is called Syriza, in Spain it's called Podemos. The Hope is coming."

These sound bites were blown apart less than a month after Syriza's election victory. Making no appeal to broad opposition in the European working class to austerity, Syriza officials jetted around the major European capitals and stock exchanges for a few weeks and promptly surrendered to the EU and the banks and the troika of the EU, the European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Podemos has applauded not only Syriza's cuts but also its formation of a ruling coalition with the far-right Independent Greeks (Anel) party, a nationalistic, anti-Semitic split-off from the right-wing New Democracy (ND) party. Iglesias said, "We have the greatest respect for the agreements reached by Syriza," adding: "I have no doubt that they will base themselves on the most essential thing, which is program and not labels."

Program is indeed more important than labels: Syriza's right-wing program has decisively trumped the "left" labels used by the bourgeois media and fellow pseudo-left parties like Podemos in their false advertising for a Tsipras government.

Podemos is well aware of the fact that, while it praises Syriza, Tsipras is capitulating to the EU. While it has carefully avoided stating that Syriza has repudiated its electoral promises, Podemos began stating that it would take a stronger line against the EU than Syriza—even before Syriza reached its February agreement with the EU.

Shortly after Tsipras' election, Iglesias said Spain is "the fourth economic power in Europe and is not threatened by the Bundesbank," Germany's central bank. He claimed that Spain was in a better position than Greece because "no one will do our homework for us." He boasted that Podemos was meeting with investors, ambassadors, including that of the United States, and people he was not "in agreement with." Iglesias added that he would happily meet "with everyone," including German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Similarly, Iñigo Errejón—a former Complutense doctoral student who is now Podemos' political secretary—told *El País*: "Spain is not Greece. We are the fourth economic power of the EU, and our capacity for negotiation is greater. Our institutional, social and economic conditions are also different."

This is a political fraud. Syriza capitulated to austerity not because Greece is smaller than Spain or Germany, but due to its absolute defense of the capitalist system. It is a bourgeois party, resting on more privileged sections of the middle class, organically hostile to social revolution and

the working class. From the beginning, it has supported the framework of the EU and the euro—i.e., the bankers' Europe.

Were it to come to power in Madrid, the attitude of Podemos to the workers would be no different. After a 7 percent contraction of Spain's economy, nearly a quarter of Spanish workers and over half of Spain's working class youth are out of work. Looking out at the population from the Moncloa Palace through multiple lines of riot police, a Prime Minister Iglesias would be as terrified of the workers as Tsipras or Spain's current prime minister, Manuel Rajoy.

Comparing Iglesias to Tsipras, the only difference that stands out is that Iglesias' rhetoric is, if anything, even more insipid and right-wing. As Iglesias visited Wall Street last month—following the trail blazed by Tsipras' visits to his CIA contacts at the Brookings Institution in Washington, DC—he appeared on the CNBC financial news channel to praise capitalism. “We assume that the market economy is a reality,” Iglesias told CNBC's *Squawk Box*, “but it has its limits.”

In fact, what is unfolding is a comprehensive breakdown of capitalism. The social catastrophe in Europe signals the disintegration of the political equilibrium that emerged from the mass struggles of the 1960s and 1970s, which toppled the junta of the colonels in Greece in 1974 and the Franco dictatorship in Spain in 1975. Long-standing parties of bourgeois rule built amid these crises, such as the social democratic Pasok in Greece and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), are collapsing after being discredited as tools of EU austerity and social retrogression.

The role of Syriza and Podemos is to steer mass anger into the dead end of electing new bourgeois governments. The populist appeals of Podemos, which criticizes the PSOE and the right-wing Popular Party (PP) as “the caste,” are the inverted reflection of explosive social anger building up in the working class against the bourgeois order. These appeals are entirely demagogic, however, as the dearest ambition of the affluent middle class layers inside Podemos is to join “the caste.”

This perspective is historically rooted in the rejection of socialist revolution by the Stalinist and pseudo-left forces in Podemos. Under Franco, the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) sought a “National Reconciliation” between the working class and the “progressive” sector of Spanish capitalism, aiming to establish a bourgeois parliamentary system. In the post-Franco transition, the PCE demobilized working class opposition in return for concessions laid out in the 1978 Moncloa Accords and Workers' Statute.

For decades, the PCE and its immediate satellites grouped in the United Left (IU) coalition have served as tools of the bourgeois order. Iglesias has therefore relied upon IA and similar pseudo-left groups, who falsely declare themselves “anti-capitalist” and have a smaller presence in parliament, to give Podemos a false, oppositional veneer. The experience of Syriza, however, is blowing their cover.

As the crisis of capitalism places on the order of the day the re-eruption of the wars and revolutionary struggles that marked the 20th century, these pseudo-left forces step forward as guardians of order. The conclusion they drew from the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe, as Iglesias made clear, is that capitalism is the only game in town. They are politically and ideologically conditioned to serve as bribed tools of finance capital.

As it enters ever more directly into the service of the bourgeois state, Podemos is adopting the vocabulary classically associated with far-right politics—praising the Church, the monarchy and the army.

Iglesias has repeatedly insisted that he is willing to make any kind of political alliance, including with explicitly right-wing forces, along the lines of Syriza's deal with Anel. In a statement declaring that he would consider deals with both the PSOE and the PP, he said, “We are not sectarian. On programmatic issues, we will not have problems with anyone.”

Podemos has also created branches within the army and supported their

demands. Iglesias held a meeting with the United Spanish Military Association with the objective of “constructing a political program that includes the inalienable rights of the military as citizens and offers a modern vision of the armed forces to the citizens. ... For this reason, the Coordination Council of Podemos will maintain a strong collaboration with the representatives of the associations of the armed forces...”

Iglesias has declared that he “would agree on a lot of things” with Pope Francis and hopes to meet with him, as well as with King Felipe VI, whom Iglesias praised for enjoying “enormous sympathy” from the Spanish people.

Such patriotic bromides have earned Podemos the praise of the right-wing press. The right-wing online daily *El Confidencial* said Podemos was accomplishing what the PP and the PSOE could not: “Iglesias has returned patriotism to the people of the left. Now the left can provide a solution appealing to a real collective sentiment, miraculously alive after decades of it being in the bottom of the wardrobe. This seems so important, so historical, I felt the need to share it with you.”

To the extent that Podemos seeks alliances abroad, it is not through appeals to international solidarity in the working class, but through appeals to diplomats and reactionary politicians.

Iglesias visited the US ambassador in Madrid after his trip to Wall Street, announcing that he views relations between Spain and the United States as a “strategic” question. He also praised Obama for his “coherence and reason” in giving an “opportunity” to the Syriza government. He explained his intention to go back to the US with the ambassador, offering to help him prepare meetings with US congressmen.

At the same time, Podemos is cultivating ties with factions of the French Left Front led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, a former social-democratic minister who last year published a book proclaiming the death of left-wing politics.

The way forward for the working class and the youth is not behind Syriza or Podemos, but in ruthless political struggle against them. The intensifying class oppression and social inequality that have emerged across Europe will not only summon forth forces like Podemos, which are the defensive reflex of a dying social order. The working class must and will emerge as an independent political force.

The central task is building a party that gives the struggle of the working class political leadership and a socialist perspective for the overthrow of capitalism, rather than the rebranding of the bourgeoisie's ruling personnel proposed by Podemos. Such a party can only be built on the historical legacy of Trotsky's struggle against Stalinism and all forms of petty-bourgeois opportunism. The turn now is to building sections of the ICFI in Spain, Greece and across Europe.



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