

Podemos party takes its place in Spain's government machinery

Vicky Short
2 July 2015

Following last month's elections in 13 of Spain's 17 regions and more than 8,000 municipalities, weeks of political horse trading have taken place.

In the elections, the combined vote for Spain's two traditional parties of rule—the ruling right wing Popular Party (PP) and the Socialist Party (PSOE), which have alternated in government for the last 40 years—slumped from 65 percent four years ago to 52 percent.

The beneficiaries have been the pseudo-left party Podemos (We Can), founded last year, and the PP split-off Ciudadanos (Citizens), which only became a national party this year after its creation in 2006 as an anti-separatist Catalan party.

The PP suffered the biggest debacle, losing all its major strongholds including the capital, Madrid, which it has governed for the last 24 years. However, it was able to regain control in some areas thanks to the support of Ciudadanos, a party that just a few weeks ago was railing against the PP's corruption.

The PSOE was not only unable to benefit from the PP's problems, but registered big losses. It only managed to survive in many regional and municipal governments through pacts with Podemos. In the run-up to the elections, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias derided the PSOE as part of the “caste” along with the PP in virtually every speech.

The votes of Podemos (and Ciudadanos) were lower than expected, and they were not able to win an outright majority in any region. As a result, Podemos formed coalitions with the PSOE, the Communist Party-led United Left (IU), regionalist or nationalist parties such as the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), EH Bildu (linked to the terror group ETA), the Valencian nationalist Compromís and so-called neighbourhood protest

organisations, which often function as satellites of Podemos. In this way they have avoided, for the time being, a crisis of government. However, none of these coalitions are stable, as in most cases they have a very slim majority of only one or two seats.

In the city of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, from “Ahora Madrid” (Madrid Now), an election coalition comprising Podemos, IU dissidents, various anti-eviction activists and remnants of the “Indignados” 15th May (15-M) protest movement, has become mayor. Out went the hated PP leader, Countess Esperanza Aguirre, thwarting the PP's attempt to form a common front with the PSOE and Ciudadanos in order to keep Ahora Madrid out of the municipal government.

Carmena, a 71-year-old retired judge, is an ex-member of the Communist Party with close ties to the PSOE. She co-founded a firm of labour lawyers which suffered a fascist massacre in 1977; she was not in the office on that day. After retiring from the judiciary in 2010, Carmena became a member of the Patronato de la Fundación Alternativas (Alternatives Foundation Board), a think tank aligned with the PSOE, whose members included the former Socialist Party prime ministers Felipe González and José Luis Zapatero.

In recent years, she has been involved in community politics, particularly in anti-eviction campaigns.

One of Ahora Madrid's election promises was to set up a public bank to finance social projects. Three days after being elected, Carmena withdrew the plan, coinciding with reports that she met with the director of Bankia, a bank responsible for 20 percent of all evictions, to reassure him bankers had nothing to fear from her government.

Asked if she was going to meet similar establishment figures, Carmena declared, “Of course. My goal is to

carry out a programme and seduce those who did not vote for me. Cleaning up the economy, leaving corruption outside the door, is going to be an incentive for the right kind of businesses to flourish.”

Asked what she would do if the courts ruled against any of her policies, including the creation of the public bank, Carmena answered, “I would obey the justice system. I have been a member of it, and to the end I will say that justice has the last word, of course.”

In Barcelona, the mayoralty has changed hands from Xavier Trias of Artur Mas’s nationalist Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) to Ada Colau of “Barcelona en Comú” (Barcelona Together), another coalition between Podemos, the ICV (Izquierda Unida-Verdes), the IU and various community movements.

Calau, an activist from the Indignados movement and founding member of the anti-eviction Platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH), has reached an agreement with the PSOE’s Catalan section, as well as with the ERC, which hopes Colau would back their policy of Catalan separatism. Colau has been equivocal about her support for separatism and the planned referendum on Catalan independence, which has been declared illegal by the government and the courts.

One of Colau’s first acts as mayor was to approve the extension of the contract for one of the world’s largest mobile electronics exhibitions, the Mobile World Congress, until 2023. Colau has made no mention of the weeks-long strike by Telefónica agency workers or the renewal of Catalan government contracts with the mobile operator. The workers were reassured by the unions that a pseudo-left government could be pressurised to cancel them.

In Valencia, the third largest city in Spain, Compromís’ Joan Ribó- with the support of the PSOE, Valencia in Comú (a similar formation to Ahora Madrid and Barcelona en Comú) and Podemos- has become mayor, overturning 20 years of PP rule.

Ribó served in the Communist Party and IU for many years, becoming an MP in the Valencian parliament for the regional arm of the IU, before deciding in 2011 to join Compromís, a party that majored on environmental and lifestyle issues—urban gardens, bans on animal shows, organic school meals, cooperatives and support for a Gay Pride festival.

In the southernmost Spanish region of Andalucía, which held elections in March, the PSOE has finally

assumed power after weeks of uncertainty and threats to call new elections, thanks to the support of Podemos.

Podemos, which was founded in March 2014 in the aftermath of the anti-austerity youth movement that became known as the 15-M Movement, or Indignados, stood in the elections on a left sounding “anti-capitalist” programme. It is a bourgeois party, however, peopled by Pabloites, Stalinists, ecologists, middle class personalities and PSOE dissidents. Having once promoted Podemos as an alternative to the PSOE “caste”, Iglesias now justifies the pacts with the party saying “the PSOE has changed”.

The IU was all but wiped out in the elections, losing nearly 500,000 votes and ending up with just five seats and 4.7 percent of the vote, down from 6.3 percent in 2011. IU has been able to win influence in several regions by joining Podemos in some places, the PSOE in others and elsewhere renaming themselves as the circumstances demand.

The coming together of these parties with the PSOE is proof that they offer no progressive solution for the working class, which faces a terrible economic crisis, mass unemployment and an unbearable social situation. New measures are being prepared to cut benefits, cut pensions and lower wages and conditions while strengthening the power of the state against protests, strikes and all forms of opposition. Podemos and all its satellites have become part of the state machine for imposing this agenda.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact