

Post-elections negotiations fail to produce new Spanish government

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After the December 20 parliamentary elections, the negotiations between the major parties have failed to produce a government. The failed negotiations are leading to an internal crisis in the two largest parties, the currently ruling Popular Party (PP) and the main opposition Socialist Party (PSOE), with calls for a leadership change if the deadlock is not broken and new elections are called.

The parliamentary elections produced an unprecedented hung parliament and the collapse of the two-party system that has dominated Spanish politics since the end of the fascist Franco dictatorship in 1977. The PP and PSOE lost between them both over 5 million votes and 83 seats. In the 350-member parliament, the PP has 123 seats, the PSOE 90, the pseudo-left Podemos 69 and the right-wing Citizens 40 seats.

In January, interim Prime Minister and PP leader Mariano Rajoy will face a vote of confidence on whether he can stay on as leader of the government. In the first vote, he will need the backing of at least 176 lawmakers in the assembly. If this fails, Rajoy will have a second vote 48 hours later in which he would need more votes for than against him.

At this writing, it seems unlikely that Rajoy will obtain the necessary support from other parties for his government to survive. Rajoy has attempted a new round of talks with the leaders of the PSOE and the two new parties, Podemos and Citizens, in an attempt to form a new government.

The PP has received the support of Citizens, who are willing to abstain in order to allow the PP to rule. This has exposed the latter's anticorruption rhetoric during the campaign as an empty cover for a pro-PP orientation. The PP and high-leading members are currently embroiled in dozens of corruption cases

including the famous Bárcenas case on the party's illegal financing methods and the Gürtel contracts-for-kickbacks corruption case.

Apart from Citizens, the PP needs the support or at least the abstention of the PSOE in order to form a government. However, the PSOE's current leadership has said it would vote no, with César Luena, PSOE secretary of organization, stating that "our responsibility is to say no to the PP and no to Rajoy."

The looming scenario of snap elections if Rajoy cannot be voted in as Prime Minister is creating an internal crisis with the PP. After the loss of a third of the PP's deputies, former Prime Minister José María Aznar has called for a new congress of the PP to "define the future of our project and elect a new leadership."

Internal discontent has been mounting as a result of the PP's results in European, regional and local elections this year, and Rajoy's perceived weakness against Catalan secessionism.

The PSOE is not faring better; it received its worst-ever electoral results, barely winning 340,000 votes more than Podemos. PSOE General Secretary Pedro Sánchez is facing an internal leadership challenge after 17 months in as party leader, by the regional leader of the southern region of Andalusia, Susana Díaz.

Díaz has tried to call a party congress to decide whether a change in leadership is necessary, and to thwart any attempt by Sánchez to strike a deal with Podemos that would imply a referendum on independence on Catalonia.

On Monday, Sánchez gave in to Díaz, stating that he is working "his fingers to the bone" to try to deal with Podemos, but he would not do so "at any price".

Sanchez said that the "prior condition" for talks with Podemos was that it "renounce any position that

implies the rupture of the coexistence between Spaniards... We will not discuss the territorial integrity of Spain."

The conditions that Podemos set for an alliance with the PSOE exposes Podemos as another bourgeois party, with minor tactical differences with the rest of the parties.

Holding a referendum in Catalonia on independence is not a democratic, let alone socialist, demand. Podemos has taken a demand defended by sections of the bourgeoisie in the richest region in Spain.

Factions of the Catalan bourgeoisie, widely despised for having imposed savage austerity and meted out severe repression of protests across the region, aim to hold a referendum in Catalonia in order to give a democratic veneer to a reactionary project which aims to transform Catalonia into a low-tax, cheap-labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations.

This measure has received the wholehearted support of the pseudo-left groups that founded Podemos and orbit around it and the Stalinist-led United Left, which backed Catalan nationalist demands for decades as part of its integration with regional nationalist forces.

Even sections within the bourgeoisie are arguing that a referendum may be the best solution to put an end to Catalan secessionism.

El País columnist Xavier Vidal-Folch wrote in defence of a referendum: "do not confuse [regional Catalan president] Artur Mas with Catalan citizens, defenders of holding a referendum. Some to leave. And probably the immense majority to show that they want to stay, in a different way. That the Catalans will have to vote one day on their political future and its links with Spain is even known to the most ignorant centralist. Even the staunchest Taliban Spanish nationalist."

By focusing on the referendum issue, Podemos is making clear that it has no differences with the PSOE on war and austerity. The PSOE first imposed cuts in public expenditure, labour and pension "reforms" and wage cuts, and supported the war on Libya in 2011 and the continued US-led occupation of Afghanistan. The PSOE also amended Article 135 of the Spanish Constitution to assert the concept of "budget stability" while introducing the absolute priority of debt and interest repayment, opening the way to continued

austerity imposed by the Popular Party.

What is emerging ever more clearly in the post-election negotiations is that the way forward to struggle against the capitalist class requires a new party to struggle for a socialist and internationalist programme to offer political leadership to the working class.

The new parties, Citizens and Podemos, are not fundamentally different from the old PSOE and the PP. Whether a grand coalition is formed (PP-PSOE-Citizens) or a minority Socialist-Podemos government supported by smaller parties is formed after January or new elections are called, will not change the class character of the policies pursued by the Spanish state.

A PSOE-Podemos government would prove a no less ruthless defender of war, austerity and the European Union than its sister parties elsewhere.

In Portugal, the recently elected Socialist Party (PS) government is bailing out the eighth-largest commercial bank, the Banco Internacional do Funchal SA (Banif). The bailout was only possible because Podemos's sister party in Portugal, the Left Bloc (BE), and the Communist Party (PCP) brought the minority PS government to power last month.

In Greece, the Syriza government repudiated its anti-austerity platform and imposed tens of billions of euros in new social cuts, which has led to the average standard of living declining by 40 percent in a few years.



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