

Podemos considers forming government with Spanish social democrats

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11 January 2016

Amid the deep political crisis in Spain produced by the hung parliament that emerged from the December 20 general elections, Podemos is indicating that it will consider forming a government with the Socialist Party (PSOE). The purpose of such a government could only be to enforce further unpopular austerity measures on working people and the entire Spanish population.

This underscores that Podemos, regardless of its rhetoric, does not aim to carry out an alternative or radical policy. Instead, like Syriza, its ally in Greece, it aims to give a face lift to a discredited political establishment—in this case, working with the PSOE, which has waged imperialist wars and enforced savage austerity measures against the Spanish people.

After the elections, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias rapidly indicated that he was willing to enter into negotiations with the PSOE if the PSOE accepted a referendum on the independence of Catalonia. After the PSOE rejected this appeal, Podemos took further steps to try to smooth the way to a Podemos-PSOE pact. It recently downplayed the importance of the Catalan referendum.

Iglesias appealed for support from “sensible” sectors of the PSOE, in an effort to keep the PSOE from entering into a “grand coalition government” with the right-wing Popular Party (PP).

This call is winning support inside the PSOE. Last week, PSOE General Secretary Pedro Sánchez traveled to Lisbon to meet with Portugal’s new prime minister, Antonio Costa. Costa’s Socialist Party (PS) heads a minority government relying on tacit support from the Portuguese equivalents of Podemos, the Left Bloc and the Portuguese Communist Party. It poses no challenge to the social order; one of Costa’s first acts in office was to engineer a €2.2 billion state bailout of Bank Banif.

After the meeting, Sánchez called for a “broad coalition for government with progressive forces” along Portuguese lines.

Podemos initially reacted somewhat coolly to Sánchez’ proposal, complaining that the PSOE has not yet put anything on the table to negotiate, and that they “have the feeling” that the PSOE is committed to a PSOE-PP coalition. Podemos then issued to the PSOE a vague counter-proposal for an emergency package of undefined “social measures” and for the recognition of Podemos’ regional allies as separate parliamentary groups. This would increase the total financial resources available to Podemos in parliament.

There is rising sentiment in sections of the ruling class for a Podemos-PSOE coalition, however, and commentators are increasingly pointing to commonalities between Podemos and the PSOE. In an article titled “23 common points in the PSOE and Podemos programmes,” Infolibre wrote, “beyond their disagreements and dialectical opposition on this issue [the Catalan referendum], the PSOE and Podemos defend similar social and institutional measures.”

This is the outcome of two years of intensive work by Podemos to convince the Spanish bourgeoisie and international finance capital that it can be trusted in government. It has appealed to the army, by including a former head of the Spanish general staff in its electoral lists, and hailed the Pope.

In 2014, Iglesias called on an assembly of bankers and businessmen to support Podemos’ “national salvation programme” in Madrid’s Ritz hotel. On tour in the United States, Iglesias defended the free market as the only viable economic system in interviews with financial news channel CNBC. He has also supported Syriza’s austerity measures in Greece.

Unsurprisingly, big business groups do not perceive a

PSOE-Podemos government as a threat. Javier González de Lara, head of the Confederation of Business in Andalusia, stated that business does “not fear an agreement between the left,” but “instability and new elections.”

The PSOE, for its part, is currently paralyzed as it tries to decide between offers of an alliance from both Podemos and the PP. The PP is calling for the formation of a government consisting of an alliance of the PP, PSOE and the right-wing Citizens’ party. It has also called on “sensible” sectors of the PSOE not to ally with “radicals” like Podemos.

The PSOE fears that by backing a PP-led government, the PSOE would discredit itself even more and open the way to a surge in support for Podemos. However, until now it has refused to form a “left” alliance with Podemos, as it opposes holding a referendum on secession in Catalonia.

Added to this, PSOE Secretary General Pedro Sanchez faces a leadership challenge from the head of the Andalusia regional government, Susana Diaz. Diaz wants to call a party congress to replace Sanchez and has managed to have the PSOE’s executive pass a resolution requiring that Podemos and other forces renounce a referendum as a pre-condition for negotiations.

The influential pro-PSOE daily El País published an editorial urging the PSOE to choose a course of action promptly, in order to maintain political stability. It remarked that “an internal struggle has broken out in the PSOE,” warning that this could “call into question the survival of a party with more than 100 years of history and...[may] end up harming the interests of all.”

“If the party believes he [Sanchez] is no longer the right person for the job, and that a change is needed...the mechanisms for such decision should be activated and should proceed,” it declared.

Podemos is attempting to shore up the PSOE, a key instrument of capitalist rule in Spain, amidst its most important crisis in decades. The PSOE has ruled Spain for 25 of the 38 years since the end of the fascist Franco dictatorship. It imposed deep cuts in public expenditure, labour and pension “reforms,” and wage cuts, and also 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.

A PSOE-Podemos government will be relentlessly hostile the interests of the working class, and would renege on any “progressive” promises once it took office, as did Syriza in Greece.

The bitter experience of the working class in Greece, where Podemos’ sister party Syriza has decided to impose even more brutal austerity on the working class than did previous governments, is a warning. Podemos’ willingness to enter agreements with the PSOE shows that it is following in the footsteps of Syriza, preparing to junk any “progressive” measures in its program and impose ruthless and reactionary policies.

The authors also recommend:

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[20 March 2015]



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