

Podemos enters government talks with Spain's social democrats, conservatives

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On Tuesday, Podemos entered into coalition talks with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) on possibly forming a government together with the right-wing Citizens party. Podemos general secretary Pablo Iglesias exchanged text messages with PSOE chief Pedro Sánchez via Internet, while Compromis, the affiliate of Podemos in the Valencia region, is preparing to meet with the PSOE and Citizens.

It must be bluntly stated that the political differences between Podemos, the PSOE, and Citizens are minimal. Podemos's Greek ally Syriza formed a government last year with the far-right Independent Greeks that imposed savage austerity on the workers, which Podemos enthusiastically supported. Nonetheless, the broaching of government alliances including Podemos and an explicitly right-wing party like Citizens is a significant new step to the right, and a warning that the bourgeoisie is preparing deep attacks on the working class.

Podemos is brazenly discarding its past criticisms of the ruling elite. It had called Citizens a thinly disguised rebranding of the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and a tool of the ruling "caste," and Iglesias called the PSOE-Citizens alliance "despicable" and a tool of the "oligarchy" when it was announced. Nonetheless, Iglesias offered to serve in a PSOE-led government as a vice-prime minister for media and intelligence matters, as long as Podemos held a number of ministerial posts.

On Tuesday, however, as news of his talks with the PSOE broke, Iglesias sent an open letter to Podemos supporters, titled "Defending Beauty," and demanding that they respect party unity.

He accused unnamed opponents of trying to sabotage Podemos: "They are trying to set up a new myth to weaken us, according to which there are two Podemoses, one of which is docile and ready to

facilitate the installation of a PSOE-Citizens government, and which is facing off against a more radical Podemos."

Iglesias baldly argued that Podemos was joining talks for the good of Spain: "In a crucial historic moment for the future of our country, they are again putting our maturity to the test and trying to sow discord. ... In Podemos there must not be currents or factions that compete for control of bureaucracies and resources, that would turn us into what we always fought: just another party."

In fact, the political crisis that erupted after the December 20 elections produced a hung parliament in Spain is exposing all of Podemos's factions as reactionary pro-capitalist tendencies. In the run-up to Iglesias's statement Tuesday, tactical divisions inside the Spanish bourgeoisie and state machine over how to form a government were threatening to tear Podemos apart.

After Sánchez predictably failed to form a PSOE-Citizens government—the two parties had only 130 parliamentary seats, while 176 are needed to form a government—a crisis erupted in Podemos.

This crisis re-emerged yesterday, when Podemos sacked its number-three member, Sergio Pascual. It cited his "deficient management whose consequences have seriously damaged Podemos at such a delicate moment as the negotiation process to put together a government of change."

Podemos members did not try to hide that the question at stake in the faction fight was how quickly to join a government and drop the pretense of being a party of "change." Podemos founder and former leading member Juan Carlos Monedero told *El País*, "Some want to enter into government as soon as possible even though the circumstances are not optimal;

others meanwhile want to continue consolidating their claim to represent change, and they will not want to subordinate themselves so urgently to policies which are not their own.”

The Anticapitalist Left (IA), the Spanish affiliate of France’s Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party and a founding tendency in Podemos, spoke of those within Podemos who believe they will obtain more power and influence in future elections if, for now, they keep projecting a false, “left” image.

It argued against supporting a “grand coalition” between the PP, PSOE, and Citizens, arguing that “the forces of change have to promote a grand social coalition that will seek to continue disordering the social and political landscape.” They added, “we have to prepare ourselves to be in the best situation in a scenario full of risks but also opportunities.”

Iglesias also opposed direct talks with the PSOE and Citizens, instead holding up the model of a “Valencian” government—referring to the Valencian region, where Compromís and the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) support a PSOE government.

Increasingly, however, IA and Iglesias could not contain the frenzied rush of Podemos members to obtain lucrative posts in the state machine and attack the workers. Manuela Carmena, the Podemos-backed mayor of Madrid, said that she defended entering into talks, calling on Podemos to make a difference between forming a government with the PSOE and Citizens, and supporting Sánchez as prime minister. She claimed that such deals are very “elastic” and allow for “converging in a very subtle way.”

This “subtle” strategy appears to have possibly been a reference to a cynical deal in which Podemos would abstain from voting against a PSOE-Citizens government, allowing it to be formed and giving it political support without formally joining it.

In the Madrid region, nine party officials of the regional Executive Council of Podemos close to the party’s number two, Iñigo Errejón, resigned, declaring their lack of support of pro-Pablo Iglesias Madrid leader Luis Alegre. Emilio Delgado, the party’s organisation secretary in Madrid, had previously resigned.

There are also internal tensions in other Podemos regional branches. In the Basque country, Galicia and Cantabria, the branches attacked the national leadership

for overstepping its authority and trying to decide their territorial affairs, as they each try to set up their own regional alliances with the social democrats or other pro-austerity parties.

In Catalonia, Podemos’s Albano Dante Fachín and Joan Giner nearly succeeded in removing the pro-Iglesias leadership under Gemma Ubasar. They tried to call a congress to renew the leadership in Catalonia and ally themselves with Barcelona mayor Ada Colau.

Colau recently gave a glimpse of what a Podemos government would be like. The so-called “mayor of change” worked to defeat a strike of 3,200 workers of Barcelona’s public metro system (TMB). She opposed strike action and, once it was called anyway, set a strike-breaking, legally mandated “minimum service” requirement to keep trains running during the strike.



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