

Podemos, United Left form alliance for June elections

Alejandro López
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The pseudo-left party Podemos and the Communist Party-led United Left (IU) have concluded an electoral alliance, “50 Steps to Rule Together” for the general election called for June 26.

Spain’s Congress was dissolved earlier this month, following the failure of repeated attempts to form a coalition government after the previous election on December 20.

Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias declared that it would be “an honour to walk together and to work together,” adding, “What is important is that a political space has been born today that can beat the Popular Party [PP].”

Alberto Garzón, leader of IU, said, “What joins us is our enormous desire to serve our people, the popular classes.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. The electoral coalition has nothing progressive about it. Like the failed attempt to form a similar alliance before December’s election, it is dedicated to preventing growing social opposition, expressed in the crisis of the decades-old two-party system, from developing into a conscious political movement against capitalism.

Podemos wants to create the basis for a pro-austerity government by putting pressure on the Socialist Party (PSOE), which rejected its pleas to form a “Government of Change” involving the IU and Valencian regionalist party Compromís, supported by Catalan and Basque nationalists. Instead the PSOE made a pact with the right-wing Citizens party and attempted to get Podemos to support it. Podemos leaders held a referendum of the party’s membership, which voted 88 percent in opposition to the PSOE-Citizens pact and 92 percent for the Government of Change proposal.

By forming an electoral alliance, Podemos and the IU

could increase their number of deputies in Congress rather than standing as single parties. In December, the combined result of the two parties would have totalled 6.1 million votes, compared to the PSOE’s 5.5 million and the PP’s 7.2 million. According to a poll carried out by *El Diario*, Podemos, the PSOE and IU would get 169 seats, just seven short of an absolute majority of 176 in the 350 seat chamber. However, although Podemos and IU would receive more votes than the PSOE they would obtain less seats due to the way the electoral system works—leaving the PSOE as the senior partner.

At the heart of the “50 Steps to Rule Together” agreement is the acceptance of the framework of austerity. The only rider is that deficit reduction should be at a “slower pace”—a proposal that is perfectly compatible with the demands of the European Commission, which is already talking about Madrid having more leeway.

The agreement includes proposals such as “struggling against climate change”, “struggle against corruption”, “strengthen the welfare state and public services”, increasing the minimum wage and increasing taxes on the rich. Workers and youth should have no illusions in these empty promises.

Both Podemos and the IU have a long track-record of utilising left-sounding rhetoric only to renege on it later. During the failed “Government for Change” negotiations between Podemos and the PSOE, Iglesias made 20 “concessions” to the PSOE including commitment to “deficit reduction,” a “less ambitious” tax reform and the abandoning of a rise in the minimum wage and retirement at 67. Podemos also dropped its demand for €90 billion in public expenditure to €60 billion and for the PSOE’s 2010 labour reform to be reversed.

Podemos has continued courting the PSOE even after the dissolution of parliament and the call for new elections. Its latest proposal is for a joint ticket with the PSOE for the Senate to “finish with the PP blockade in this legislative organ.” PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez has rejected the offer.

The IU has repeatedly shown its readiness to impose austerity. In Andalusia, one of the poorest and most populated areas, the Stalinist coalition formed a regional government with the PSOE imposing budget cuts amounting to €2.6 billion in two years. In the neighbouring region of Extremadura, it propped up a PP government which imposed savage austerity in education and health care spending.

In the “50 Steps to Rule Together” agreement, the IU has abandoned its calls to establish a Third Republic (i.e. a new bourgeois republic without the monarchy), leave NATO, and nationalise strategic sectors of the economy. Leaving aside that they never intended to carry out these measures, abandoning them shows their readiness to defend the strategic interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie. Iglesias’ party has also defended Spain’s membership in NATO and included in its electoral lists a former Chief of Staff of the Spanish army.

The electoral alliance has been met with a hue and cry by the right-wing press, which is accusing IU leader Garzón of liquidating his party into Podemos. A recent editorial in *El Mundo* warned about the IU’s “appeasement” of Podemos and another blamed Garzón because he had “killed the traditional internationalism of the Spanish communist left”. It berated the IU for its “madness and forgetting some of the main principles of coexistence.”

La Razón accused IU of giving a blank check to Podemos and Spain’s oldest newspaper, ABC, bemoaned “the gradual disappearance of a communist party that has always been constructive” and for its “surrender in exchange for a plate of lentils.”

These statements reveal the overriding concern of the Spanish ruling elite. The mounting economic and social problems have already led to the break-up of the two party system that has governed Spain for the last 40 years and must inevitably lead to an eruption of social and political struggles.

Historically, the Communist Party, latterly through the IU and its control of the CC.OO trade union confederation, has played a key role in containing the

opposition within the working class from developing into an independent political movement. Its alliance with Podemos in order to take part in a pro-austerity government with the PSOE is tearing off its supposedly left-wing mask and creates an explosive vacuum in which a revolutionary alternative will gain a hearing.



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