

Unidos Podemos pulls ahead of Socialist Party in Spanish election campaign

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18 June 2016

With a new campaign underway for the June 26 parliamentary elections, six months after the last elections produced a hung parliament which was incapable of forming a government, polls indicate that the ruling Popular Party would win the elections, with the pseudo-left Unidos Podemos (UP) second, and the Socialist Party (PSOE) a distant third.

According to a Metroscopia poll, if elections were held now the PP would get 28.5 percent of the vote, UP 25.6 percent, and the PSOE 20.2 percent. In the last elections last December, the PP won 28.7 percent, the PSOE 22 percent, and Podemos 20.7 percent.

The latest polls confirm the historic breakdown of the two party-system that has dominated Spanish politics since the end of the fascist dictatorship in 1978. Six months ago, the December 20 elections produced an unprecedented hung parliament and the collapse of the two-party system, with the PP and PSOE losing a combined total of over 5 million votes and 83 seats.

The elections were a repudiation of savage austerity policies pursued by the PSOE and the PP at all levels of government: cuts to social services, pensions and salaries, bank bailouts, labour market reforms, privatizations, and deregulation.

The global economic crisis and these vindictive austerity policies have produced mass unemployment of 21.6 percent (47.7 percent for youth), with about 60 percent of the unemployed out of work for more than one year. Poverty and social exclusion has risen from 10.4 million people in 2007 to 13.4 million in 2014.

The undeserving political beneficiary, in the short run, is Podemos, which is trying to channel social opposition back behind the PSOE. As its leader Pablo Iglesias—flanked by number two Íñigo Errejón and the leader of the Stalinist-led United Left (IU), Alberto Garzón—told supporters in Madrid at the start of the

campaign: “It is very likely that we will have to take on very important responsibilities ... We are going to reach out to them [the PSOE] to head a government of change.”

Iglesias said the Unidos Podemos alliance between Podemos and IU is the “new social democracy.”

“What we want,” Iglesias said, “is to position ourselves as the alternative model of society which was led by social democracy for many years against the austerity policies of the PP.”

Such a remark speaks volumes as to the program of the Unidos Podemos alliance. The PSOE imposed the first cuts to public expenditure and wages, labour and pension “reforms” after the 2008 crisis, laying out the main lines of the policies later pursued by PP governments. Along with the PP, it passed the constitutional reform which prioritizes repayment of the debt over other spending, enshrining a framework of unending austerity within the constitution.

The PSOE has acted as the main instrument of capitalist rule in Spain since the end of Franco, ruling for 22 of the 38 years. It spearheaded Spain’s deregulations and privatizations, entry into the European Union, the common currency and NATO. It supported the war in Libya in 2011, the occupation of Afghanistan, and the new bilateral defence agreement allowing the US military permanent use of bases in Spain—an integral part of the Pentagon’s plans for fighting an offensive war against nuclear-armed Russia and China.

Podemos’ attempt to promote the legacy of the PSOE and European social democracy, turning the clock back to a period in which it was not so deeply discredited, testifies to its deep hostility to the working class. It is rapidly junking even the limited proposals of change that it made in its earlier party programmes, based

largely on the claim that there have “been many changes in the Spanish economy, and for this reason we have updated our economic proposals.”

The main thrust of its proposals is to promote illusions in the European Union. While the EU is threatening to impose multi-billion euro fines on Spain if it does not slash public spending, Podemos is promising that it can negotiate a reduction in the deficit with the EU while boosting public spending by €60 billion—down from an earlier promise of €90 billion.

On the refugee crisis, they propose to allow asylum petitions in Spanish embassies and consulates and the creation of a European Rescue Agency. That is, the same EU that has adopted a policy of not rescuing drowning migrants in the Mediterranean and which is carrying out a criminal policy of sealing off the borders, costing the lives of thousands of refugees, will suddenly make a 180 degree turn.

These proposals are only for public consumption, however; as internal sources from Podemos have confirmed to various newspapers, this programme is the one which is being prepared to be put on the table in talks on formation of a government with the PSOE. That is, once the programme has provided them with an empty and false “left” guise, anything in it that is unacceptable to the PSOE's austerity policies will be ditched.

After the December 20 elections, Podemos made two rounds of concessions to form a government with the PSOE. The main difference that emerged was reportedly on the region of Catalonia, where Podemos proposes to hold a referendum on independence from Spain.

In the end, the PSOE turned to the right-wing Citizens party to form a government, which twice failed to get sufficient parliamentary support. After wavering on the issue, Podemos refused to join a PSOE-Citizens coalition, fearing that it would have totally exposed its pretensions of being an alternative to austerity. Instead, the party intensified its pleas to the PSOE and called an internal referendum on whether to support a PSOE-Citizens government.

Podemos' new social democracy is as rotten as the old one. What is clear is that none of the social and political problems facing the workers and youth will be solved by a Unidos Podemos-PSOE government.

On the contrary people will find—as in Greece, where

the pseudo-left Syriza government reneged on its promises to end austerity and imposed deep social cuts—that the rising opposition to austerity in the working class will only find expression outside the political establishment.



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