

Spain's elections intensify crisis of bourgeois rule

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On June 26, Spaniards will be called to vote for the second time in six months to elect the next parliament. The election is set to produce another hung parliament like that of last December's elections, with neither of the major four parties—the Popular Party (PP), Citizens, the Socialist Party (PSOE) and Unidos Podemos (UP)—able to gain a majority in parliament.

On Sunday, three separate polls by Metroscopia, Sigma Dos and GAD3 found that UP, an alliance between Podemos and the Stalinist-led United Left (IU), is making big gains at the expense of the PSOE. It would garner between 84 and 95 parliamentary seats in the 350-seat parliament, up from 71 seats won in December. The PSOE would fall from 90 to 78 and 85 seats. The PP under interim Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy would get between 113 to 129 votes, and Citizens 40 to 41.

While the major four parties are committed to not repeating elections, any government emerging from these elections would be weak, divided, and unpopular. The most widely cited possible configurations would be a grand coalition between the PP, Citizens and the PSOE, or a UP-PSOE government.

Rajoy has stated that he hopes for a coalition government with PSOE and Citizens, stating, “I continue to believe that the best thing is to have a government with a wide parliamentary support, and I am willing to work for this”.

Albert Rivera, Citizens' leader, has stated that his party will not vote for Rajoy, but could abstain to allow him to rule or support another PP candidate. Rivera has called for a “negotiating table between the three constitutional parties, PP-PSOE-Citizens, without waiting one minute”.

Rivera has also opened the door to the parliament voting for an “independent” candidate, in other words,

the creation of an unprecedented technocratic government supported by the PP, Citizens and the PSOE.

The PSOE, led by Pedro Sánchez, is in a weaker position than in December. Polls show his party has been overtaken by Unidos Podemos, relegating the PSOE to a third position for the first time since the 1977 elections after the death of General Francisco Franco.

The social democrats have so discredited themselves by their previous cost-cutting measures that they are incapable of political benefiting from the explosive social anger at the PP's years of cuts, tax hikes and corruption scandals.

Sánchez, who failed to get enough parliamentary support for a PSOE-Citizens government last April, is claiming that he will rule neither with the PP nor with Podemos. However, his position within the PSOE is precarious.

If the party suffered the ever more likely historic defeat, it could allow internal opponents to remove Sánchez to allow such a grand coalition. A possible successor could be the current regional premier of Andalusia, Susana Díaz. Along with the PSOE old guard led by the former Prime Minister Felipe González, Díaz became the leading contender to Sánchez's leadership after the December elections, opposing any attempt to form a government with Podemos, claiming that the pseudo-left's key requirement to hold a referendum on independence in Catalonia was unacceptable.

Nonetheless, the other likely government is a Unidos Podemos-PSOE government, supported by separatist and nationalist parties.

Under Iglesias, UP has framed its entire electoral campaign as preparing a “government of change” with

the PSOE. Its electoral ads, pamphlets, and Iglesias' speeches and interventions in debates are all directed to pressuring the PSOE for this government.

UP has accepted "deficit reduction", i.e., austerity, the European Union and NATO. Podemos has also abandoned its populist rhetoric. Words such as "caste" and "oligarchs" are omitted and instead Podemos is now promoting itself as the new social democracy, a clear indication that it aims to save the post-Franco order from mass opposition to the establishment parties.

Iglesias has also renounced the main condition it had imposed on the PSOE to form a coalition in the post-December negotiations: the independence referendum in Catalonia.

No sooner had Sánchez stated that "We will not support a government which fragments the Spanish national sovereignty, and which questions the economic and social viability of the welfare state", than Iglesias intervened in the radio last Tuesday to state, "Our proposal is that there is a referendum, but we are available to talk about anything. We wish to talk without red lines and hear other kinds of proposals."

Meanwhile the separatist Republican Left of Catalonia has stated that it would be willing to support such a government only if it agreed to a referendum to be held in less than a year after it was elected.

Whatever coalition of parties emerges to rule Spain after the elections, what is clear is that it will be ferociously hostile to the opposition to austerity and war in the Spanish population, and to the growing militancy in the European working class. There are escalating strikes against austerity measures in France, Belgium, and against Podemos' ally, Syriza, in Greece. Yet all Spain's parties are committed to deepening the assault on living standards and defending Spanish imperialism abroad.

What is being prepared is a confrontation with the working class. The question posed for the ruling class is whether it will bring Podemos to power to try to channel the mass anti-austerity opposition into a new dead end like the Syriza government, or whether it will use Podemos as a safety valve in the case a PP-Citizens-PSOE coalition is set up.

The intensification of the crisis will drive wider layers of workers and youth into social and political struggle. The unsustainable levels of unemployment, 23

percent overall and 45 percent among youth, nearly a third of the families living in poverty, and wage cuts and job insecurity offers no viable solution within the capitalist system.



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