

Podemos fractures after poor Spanish election result

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The biggest surprise of the re-run elections in Spain on June 26 was the poor performance of Unidos Podemos (UP), the newly-minted electoral agreement between the pseudo-left party Podemos and the Communist Party-led United Left (IU). Calculations that more seats would be won through a coalition than by campaigning separately failed to materialise. While UP garnered 71 seats in Congress, the same as the two parties did separately in last December's election, it lost some 1.2 million votes.

All polls, up to the day of the elections, had forecast big gains for the coalition, to the point that it would overtake the Socialist Party (PSOE) to become the second-largest party and be able to dictate terms for a coalition "left" government. There was even talk that Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias would be the next Prime Minister.

For several days after the election, Podemos officials were essentially at a loss to explain the results, and announced that it would take some time to find out what went wrong.

Finally, nearly a week later, Iglesias emerged to blame his former supporters for their supposed "fear of the new", the impact of the Brexit vote in the UK, and the media's hostile attitude. He defended the electoral alliance with IU and demanded Podemos leaders exercise in "restraint".

Indulging in a WWI metaphor derived from postmodernist writer Ernesto Laclau and borrowed in turn from Gramsci, Iglesias argued that Podemos faces years of "trench warfare" rather than the "storming the front" approach seen to date.

It did not take long before "trench warfare" broke out in Podemos itself. At Saturday's meeting of its leadership council, Iglesias was criticised for the "harsh tone" he adopted in negotiations with the PSOE after

December's elections. Podemos number two, Íñigo Errejón, blamed the defeat on the IU alliance as did Mónica Oltra, leader of Compromís in Valencia.

On Monday, the Podemos-backed mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, declared her "total independence" from the parties that paved the way for her election last year and continue to support her in Madrid city hall. She stated that "the link is non-existent," adding apparently without a trace of embarrassment, "This is a municipality very identified with my name."

In all the discussions about the reasons for the lost votes, no Podemos leader has entertained the possibility that workers and youth are beginning to grow tired of the party, and to see it as a right-wing pro-capitalist outfit no different to the PSOE headed by a leader, in Iglesias, who bent over backwards to reassure the Spanish and European ruling class that he would protect their interests.

Podemos leaders spouted populist rhetoric against the ruling "caste" whilst combining appeals to Spanish patriotism, the army, and the free market. Iglesias repeated that Podemos was "neither left nor right". After the December 20 election produced a hung parliament, it made a further series of concessions in an attempt to form a "left coalition" with the PSOE. In the days before June 26, Iglesias declared that Podemos was the "new social democracy" and that former PSOE Prime Minister José Zapatero was "the best PM in Spain's history".

Like Syriza in Greece, Podemos's pledges to carry out a "left" policy against austerity have proven to be lies, designed only to win power. Another Podemos-supported mayor, Ada Colau in Barcelona, recently gave a glimpse of what a Podemos government would be like when she sought to defeat the strike on Barcelona's metro. Podemos has kept the opposition

expressed in various strike movements and the *indignados* youth protests within safe channels, giving the bourgeoisie a breathing space in which to regroup and prepare a new offensive.

Caretaker Popular Party (PP) Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has attempted to form a “grand coalition” with the PSOE, which won 85 seats, down 5 from December—their worst election result since the restoration of bourgeois democracy in Spain in the 1970s. However, following Saturday’s meeting of the PSOE Federal Committee which said it would not take part in such a coalition and remain a “loyal opposition”, media reports suggest the PP could scrape together an administration without them. This would involve Citizens (which has 32 seats), the Basque Nationalist Party (five seats), the Canary Islands Coalition (one seat) and the abstention of a deputy from the New Canary Islands party.

The central question facing the working class is how to intervene independently and assert its own interests in opposition to pseudo left parties like Podemos and Syriza. These have come forward to fill the void left by the collapse of the old social democratic parties but are, in reality, pro-austerity bourgeois parties.

Similarly the Pabloites, state capitalists and Militant Tendency—who have played a key role in helping to create, promote, advise and apologise for such formations—are exposed as tools of the Spanish bourgeoisie.

In the run-up to the election the Revolutionary Left (the former Militant Tendency), declared that a UP government would “break with cuts and austerity” and “abolish the PP laws and confront the policies dictated by the banks and the troika”. The Pabloite Anticapitalists proclaimed that these “elections are historical because, for the first time in many years, a force that represents the people’s yearnings for change can win the elections”. In Struggle, the sister party of the British Socialist Workers Party asserted that a vote for UP was “without a doubt, to support change”.

Following the result, the main criticism of these tendencies was Podemos abandoning “mass mobilisations” and “popular agitation” to put pressure on the PSOE.

Anticapitalists leader Jaime Pastor also complained that the organisational “model” based on horizontalism and assemblies had been replaced with an “electoral

war-machine”. Nevertheless he was quick to declare, “However, there is no question of self-flagellation or settling of accounts but the rebuilding of an atmosphere of solidarity and brotherhood, respect for plurality and seeking a new framework of consensus for working together.” Pastor adopts a friendly attitude to Podemos because Anticapitalists have nationally recognised leaders in Podemos like Teresa Rodríguez in Andalusia, Euro MP Miguel Urbán, and Cadiz mayor Kichi González.

The June 26 result confirms the disintegration of the traditional bourgeois political set-up in Europe since the outbreak of the 2008 global economic crisis. Social anger is growing over Spain’s 22 percent unemployment rate, universally low wages, relentless social cuts carried out by both the PP and its PSOE predecessor government, and continuing corruption scandals. Some 52 percent of the unemployed receive no assistance whatsoever. The current weak recovery in employment, much of it seasonal in nature, is based on barebones wages and temporary contracts.



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