

Threat of third election looms in Spain

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The threat of an unprecedented third general election is looming in Spain, as attempts to form a government have ground to a halt.

A date of November 27 has already been suggested. The two previous elections, on December 20, 2015 and June 26, produced hung parliaments with no party securing an overall majority.

The failure of repeated attempts to form a government confirm the deep popular disaffection that exists with the two-party system, comprising the Popular Party (PP) and Socialist Party (PSOE), which has dominated Spanish political life since the collapse of the fascist Franco regime in 1978.

The situation in Spain is symptomatic of the crisis of the traditional bourgeois political system in Europe following the eruption of the 2008 global economic crisis. Parties that ruled for decades have collapsed, leading to the emergence of far-right movements and governments in many countries across the continent.

Where alternative and nominally left-wing governments have come to power—Syriza in Greece or the Left Bloc/Communist Party-supported Socialist Party administration in Portugal—anti-working class, pro-austerity agendas have been imposed.

This week, Spain's King Felipe VI is meeting leaders from all the parties in Congress in a desperate attempt to break the political deadlock. He has told acting PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to negotiate again with other parties to get enough support for a confidence vote on his investiture on August 5.

Rajoy needs 176 of the 350 seats in Congress to form a majority government or the abstention of enough deputies to form a minority government. He went some way to that goal at the inaugural session of Congress last week with the election of the PP's candidate for Speaker, former Public Works Minister, Ana Pastor.

Pastor secured 169 votes—137 from the PP and 32 from the right-wing anti-separatist Citizens party,

which switched its support from the PSOE, ousting its candidate Patxi López, who was only appointed to the Speaker's post in January. He obtained 155 from the benches of the PSOE (85) and pseudo-left Podemos (70).

Pastor's success was due to the abstention of the 25 nationalist deputies from the Basque Country: the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) and Bildu from Catalonia, the Republican Left (ERC) and Democratic Convergence (CDC), and the Canary Islands Coalition (CC).

The CDC's abstention is linked to back-room negotiations with the PP, which will support the CDC's bid to have its own parliamentary group despite not having the required number of deputies, allowing it higher subsidies, access to advisers and a greater voice in Congress. The PNV also came to the aid of the PP in the Senate in exchange for its own group there.

The CDC, which rules the regional government in Catalonia in the "Together for Yes" coalition with the ERC and support of the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), has claimed that the negotiations over Pastor's appointment have nothing to do with supporting Rajoy's attempts to form a new government. Catalan government spokesperson and CDC vice president, Neus Munté, declared, "We have always said that the separatist votes will not serve to perpetuate Rajoy as prime minister of the Spanish government."

The PNV has also come out saying it will vote against Rajoy during the investiture vote.

The role played by the Catalan and Basque parties reveals their anti-working class, pro-capitalist character. Nationalism and separatism are whipped up in the more prosperous regions, either to secure greater concessions from Madrid or to establish a separate state in order for the regional ruling elite to establish its own relations with the European Union (EU), gain better

access to global markets, cut taxes used to support poorer regions and exploit its own working class.

This week, the Catalan government is pushing ahead with its plans for independence by debating, in defiance of the Constitutional Court, a parliamentary working party report on the practicalities of separation, including changes to the legal, taxation and social security systems and a new foreign affairs department. A new referendum on independence is planned for next year, although the result is likely to be just as deadlocked as the political situation in Spain as a whole with recent polls showing fewer than 48 percent in favour of separation.

Catalan foreign affairs minister, Raül Romeva, declared that Madrid “has left us feeling that we just don’t have an alternative,” adding, “We have always said that we would have preferred a Scottish-type scenario, where we could negotiate with the state and hold a coordinated and democratic referendum. We keep talking to Madrid, but all we get back from them is an echo.”

Romeva said the Brexit vote in Britain revealed the need for the EU to recognise the discontent in the continent that is threatening the “European project” and take part in negotiations over the future of Catalonia. Pledging his loyalty to the EU, he declared, “Brexit isn’t good news for Europe or for Catalonia,” he said. “In Catalan logic, yes, we don’t like Brexit, but we understand that the democratic deficit in Europe is what allowed Leave to win. A process of negotiation has begun: it’s not the end of the world and it’s not paradise.”

Rajoy’s difficulties in forming a government has led to increased pressure by politicians on the PSOE to abstain, although its leader, Pedro Sánchez, continues to insist the party will vote against him. Former PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González has called for an abstention, declaring that “after losing eight months in a strange interim situation” the PSOE has to establish dialogue with the PP and, “if necessary,” accept a PP-led government while attempting to extract as many concessions as possible.

Former PSOE defence minister José Bono went further, saying, “Spain deserves a government and if it is necessary the PSOE has to abstain to prevent third elections, I believe this is a responsibility to our country, without anything in return, to go into

opposition, to lead it and end the theatre of the populist left”—a reference to the pseudo-left Podemos led by Pablo Iglesias.

Bono and González express the interest of sectors of the bourgeoisie who defend the formation of a PP government as soon as possible, even if this means that the PSOE, which obtained the worst electoral results in its history in the last elections, will be seen as having allowed the PP to rule again.

Podemos is no alternative to the PSOE or the PP. It has repeatedly shown its readiness to rule in the name of the bourgeoisie and defence of the free market. It has promoted Spanish patriotism, the army, NATO and the EU. Its local fronts ruling in Madrid, Barcelona and Cádiz boast of having reduced their deficits compared to previous PP and PSOE councils.

The fact that the alliance between Podemos and the United Left lost 1.2 million votes in June compared to December has not diminished its calls, repeated during the Speaker vote debate, for a “left government” with the PSOE, a party with a proven pro-war and pro-capitalist track record. A PSOE abstention in the investiture process leading to a PP-led government would be another damning exposure of Podemos’ attempt to provide a left-wing guise to the discredited PSOE.



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