

Spain faces third general election in one year

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After eight months without a government and two months after the second round of elections in June produced another hung parliament, a major political crisis is rising in Spain with the prospect of a third general election.

The Socialist Party (PSOE) is being called on by the media and other political parties to abstain in order to allow a minority Popular Party (PP) government to be formed. Following the June election, there was little political movement towards an agreement and the Spanish bourgeoisie has increased the pressure on the main parties to come to some sort of agreement quickly, out of fear that continued paralysis may deepen the crisis of rule, prevent an agreement with the European Union (EU) on the budget and destabilize Spain's social order.

The PP, led by caretaker Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, won 137 seats in parliament in June, which is insufficient to form a government. They need the support of other parties to reach a majority of 176 deputies in the first vote, and more yeas than nays in a hypothetical second vote, which news reports suggest would take place in the last week of August.

The PP has accepted the six conditions placed on the table by the right-wing Citizens Party in order to obtain their 32 seats supporting a PP minority government. The six conditions include Rajoy setting an investiture date in Congress, expelling PP officials targeted in corruption investigations, ending judicial privileges for elected officials, changing the electoral law, ending amnesties and pardons in corruption cases, limiting the prime minister to two terms in office, and creating a parliamentary commission to look into the Barcenas case involving illegal payments to PP officials.

Citizens' leader Albert Rivera has previously insisted repeatedly that Rajoy's departure was a condition for even beginning to talk to the PP, but that has been dropped.

The support given by Citizens to the PP once again shows that the entry of new political forces in parliament, including the pseudo-left Podemos, has not made it more responsive to broad social opposition to austerity. Rather, their role is to channel mass discontent back to the parties that have dominated the post-Franco dictatorship era.

Citizens have assumed the role, with wall-to-wall favourable coverage by the national media, of defending the bourgeoisie's call for a quick agreement to set aside all tactical differences between the PSOE and the PP. At the same time, its task is to re-brand the PP, widely seen as a corrupt party, in order to aid the PP on moving forward with implementing further austerity in the form of tax hikes and spending cutbacks amounting to 10 billion euros, as demanded by the EU.

Last Wednesday, Citizens leader Rivera wrote an open letter titled "To My Socialist Compatriots" published in *El País*, traditionally a pro-PSOE newspaper that has shifted further to the right and given Citizens wide coverage and a platform. In it Rivera appealed to the PSOE to "have a sense of state", calling on the party to abstain to allow the PP to rule.

Former Socialist Party Prime Minister Felipe González has hailed Citizens' initiative in helping to clear the way for a PP government, calling on the PSOE to allow Rajoy to govern, "even if he doesn't deserve it."

Former Defence Minister and PSOE parliamentary spokesperson José Bono has also spoken out, calling on the PSOE to abstain because "Spain deserves a government and if the PSOE has to abstain to avoid third elections, I think this is based on our responsibility to our country."

The PSOE has, to date, remained adamant in its position of "No" to Rajoy and the PP and "No" to forming an alternative government with Podemos and regional nationalists. Other than repeating their "No",

the PSOE and its leader, Pedro Sanchez, have kept as quiet as possible while Citizens takes center stage.

Miquel Iceta, the Leader of the Catalan section of the PSOE, stated that a third solution to the political deadlock would be to get rid of Rajoy and propose someone else within the PP or appoint an independent candidate. The PP responded that this is not an option; with PP spokesman Fernando Martinez Maillo saying that Rajoy “is our candidate from start to finish.”

Popular discontent with the current political setup, and all the parties, runs deep. The current vacuum of power is only heightening fears in ruling circles that the country may run adrift; resulting in damage to Spain’s economic position, its credit rating and its bond spreads. This has been intensified by the drive to secession by separatist bourgeois and pseudo-left parties in the Catalan regional government and parliament, which is being used by Citizens and the PP to put pressure on the PSOE to abstain.

If Rajoy fails, the alternative of a PSOE and Podemos government backed by regional nationalists is held in reserve, although no significant figures are saying anything publicly about such an eventuality.

Podemos has been licking its wounds after its disappointment in June, when it stood in alliance with the Stalinist-led United Left. Its leaders have mostly remained silent in recent weeks, as they have been pondering how or whether Podemos can regain its previous political momentum. Splits are emerging over electoral strategy, regional alliances, the party’s ideology or lack thereof, and other matters.

The pseudo-left party, hitherto the young upstarts in Spanish bourgeois politics, is already showing signs of being a spent force. They can no longer credibly present themselves as “insurgents” against a corrupt political system and ruling “caste” into which they have now been fully integrated, while pleading for an alliance with the openly pro-capitalist, pro-austerity and pro-NATO PSOE.

Podemos and its United Left allies have called on the PSOE to take the first step in forming a “progressive” government to remove Rajoy and the PP from Moncloa Palace. The major difficulty in forming such a government is that the Catalan nationalists have recently voted through measures in the regional parliament aimed at secession. The PSOE, a stalwart defender of the unity of Spain, is a sworn opponent of

such moves.

Any such government would be a mortal enemy of the working class. It would flaunt its “left” credentials, only with a view to shoving EU-imposed austerity down the throat of the population in the same way that the “radical left” Syriza in Greece has betrayed the Greek working class and acted as European finance capital’s must trusted ally in ramming through one austerity package after another.

The political crisis is taking place against a background of an unabated and ongoing social and economic crisis, as Spanish workers, especially young people, have suffered a devastating decline in their living standards and hopes for the future. Therefore, even if a government is installed in the coming week, the ruling class fears that it will lack the political strength and social base to implement the social counter-revolution against the working class called for in a new dose of EU-prescribed austerity.



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