

Third election looms as Spanish right fails to form a government

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After eight months without a government, Spain is no closer to forming one. The right-wing Popular Party (PP) candidate for prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, failed to receive the absolute parliamentary majority required in the first round of the investiture debate Wednesday evening.

During the debate, Rajoy warned that Spain is passing through one of the “gravest” situations since the end of the Franco dictatorship and the transition to democracy four decades ago. “It is hard to think of anything that could cause more damage to Spanish democracy than telling citizens that their vote has been useless on two occasions and that a general election needs to be held for a third time,” Rajoy declared.

The unprecedented turmoil in the Spanish parliament since two elections produced a deadlock, both last December and in June, is a stark expression of the crisis of bourgeois rule. Spanish capitalism is staggering in the face of global economic disorder, historic levels of social inequality and unemployment, and a social counterrevolution dictated by the ruling elites. The *Financial Times* warned that the impasse is “raising fears that a country used to decades of political stability has entered a new era of fragmentation and drift.”

Rajoy, after prolonging the confidence vote until he had at least some backing from other parties, failed to receive the necessary 176 votes in the 350-seat parliament to be elected prime minister in the first round. Congress deputies voted 180-170 against his reappointment. The 170 votes Rajoy received were made up of 137 from PP deputies, 32 from the right-wing pro-business Citizens party, which came fourth in both the December and June elections, and one from the Canarian Coalition.

The rest of the chamber’s parties, including the Socialist Party (PSOE), the pseudo-left Podemos

Unidos alliance and various nationalists, voted against.

Now the parliament has to wait until Friday for a second round in which the PP needs only to have more votes in favour than against. In order for this to happen, the most likely scenario would be for the PSOE to abstain. However, the PSOE’s highest body, the Federal Committee, has passed a resolution requiring its deputies to vote against.

If Rajoy loses this second vote, it would trigger a two-month window for further negotiations to form a government. If they fail, another election—the third in less than a year—would have to be called. All this takes place under the watchful eye of the European Union (EU), which tactically postponed sanctions on Spain for failing to keep its budget deficits below the 3 percent of GDP target until October 15.

It was hoped that at this point Rajoy would be able to form a government and implement €10 billion in cuts and tax hikes demanded by the EU and thus prevent a fine.

What is clear is that whatever happens in tomorrow’s vote—whether the PSOE unexpectedly abstains, allowing the PP to rule, or talks last into the two-month window of negotiations, or new elections are called—the incoming government will be pledged to savage attacks on the working class. All the parties have repeatedly expressed their commitment to imposing austerity and carrying out EU dictates.

The PP and Citizens are open advocates of austerity.

The PSOE, as the main instrument of capitalist rule in Spain—governing for 25 of the 38 years since the end of the fascist Franco dictatorship—is committed to war and austerity. It spearheaded Spain’s entry into the EU, the common currency and NATO. It imposed deep cuts in public expenditure, labour and pension “reforms” and wage cuts, and supported the war on Libya in 2011 and

the continued US-led occupation of Afghanistan.

One of the last measures of the 2008-2011 PSOE government was to include article 135 in the constitution, enshrining the repayment of the debt over other expenditure, which signifies unending austerity. Its programme is no alternative to the PP and Citizens.

Over the course of the election crisis, Podemos has confirmed it is a pro-capitalist party with no fundamental differences from the other bourgeois parties in Congress. It ditched its former, tactical criticisms of the ruling elite, and called for a PSOE government that it would enter. After the December 20 election, Podemos' leader Pablo Iglesias offered himself as vice prime minister in a PSOE-led government in exchange for ministerial posts and the control of the media and intelligence matters.

During yesterday's debate, Iglesias once again called for forming a government with the PSOE. He looked across to the benches of the PSOE, pleading that "to confront the PP, we are trustworthy and you know it. You have seen it in the local councils and regional parliaments," where Podemos and PSOE already rule together.

Like its sister party in Greece, Syriza, which has imposed the deepest austerity measures in Greece to date, Podemos is seeking to only give a mild "left" cover to continued austerity and war.

The parliamentary deadlock has revealed one fundamental fact: the end of the duopoly between the PSOE and the PP since the death of Franco and the creation of a "four-party" system has not ushered in a new era of democracy and improved living standards. Rather, the growing distrust and rapid breakdown of allegiance to these newly created parties is another sign of the deep crisis of bourgeois rule.

This process parallels the breakdown of other institutions and agreements that formed the main pillars of the post-Franco era. Under the impact of the economic crisis, the monarchy, the trade unions, and the unofficial consensus between the regions and the Spanish state are falling apart. The collapse of decades-old institutions in Spain is part of the crisis of legitimacy of the political structures of the nation-state system worldwide.

In June 2014, King Juan Carlos de Borbón, who reigned in Spain for 39 years, was forced to abdicate in favour of his son Felipe as a result of corruptions

scandals and his opulent lifestyle. Polls showed that fewer than half of the Spanish people wanted Spain to remain a constitutional monarchy. Today, they show that the monarchy registers just 4.4 out of 10 in regards to trust.

The unions fare no better. The latest data shows that since the beginning of the global economic crisis the unions have lost hundreds of thousands of members, declining from 3.2 million in 2007 to 2.5 million in 2012. This is the response of workers who have witnessed these organisations, working as partners of big business, help impose wage cuts, redundancies and greater "flexibility", whilst negotiating pension and labour "reforms" with both PSOE and PP governments.

The pact between Catalan and Basque nationalists with Madrid is also breaking down. The unofficial agreement after Franco established that the regional ruling elites would reject separatism in favour of greater autonomy and a share in the benefits accruing from Spain's membership of the EU and NATO.

These agreements started crumbling, especially in Catalonia, where the main bourgeois parties, the Democratic Convergence and the Left Republicans, have turned to separatism as a diversion from the austerity measures they have imposed. They have channelled social opposition behind the call for an independent Catalan capitalist state within the EU to act as a low-tax, cheap labour investment and production platform for the banks and transnational corporations, unconstrained from paying subsidies to the poorer regions of Spain.

Facing an unprecedented crisis, the Spanish ruling class will respond with further attacks on the working class, authoritarian forms of rule and an escalation of its militarist foreign policy.



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