

Push to install right-wing Spanish government splits Socialist Party

Alejandro López, Alex Lantier
30 September 2016

On Wednesday afternoon, half of the Federal Executive of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) resigned, in an inner-party putsch aimed at forcing the installation of a new right-wing government. The violent infighting now tearing apart the PSOE—a key instrument of capitalist rule in Spain, which has governed the country for 25 of the 38 years since the end of the fascist Franco regime—testifies to the historic character of the country’s current political crisis.

It has been nine months since Spain last had a government; the December 20 and June 26 elections both produced hung parliaments. On Wednesday, former Prime Minister Felipe González denounced current PSOE General Secretary Pedro Sánchez for refusing to back the installation of a minority, right-wing Popular Party (PP) government and pledged to abstain from voting against it when such a government was proposed in parliament.

While visiting Chile, González denounced Sánchez’s line, warning that it threatens to provoke a crisis of rule in Spain. “I feel cheated by Sánchez, he told me [previously] he would abstain in the second vote” on a PP government, González said, adding that Sánchez had “frustrated” him.

“If he has changed positions, since then he has not explained them to anyone, and he will have his reasons. I do not understand them,” declared González. “A third set of elections would be madness, it could bring about a crisis of the system.”

As reports of González’s statements emerged in Spain, 17 members of the PSOE Federal Executive resigned. These included former Defence Minister Carme Chacón, PSOE President Micaela Navarro, PSOE spokesman Carlos Pérez, and a variety of regional officials from the PSOE stronghold of Andalucía, as well as Madrid, Catalonia, Valencia and

Castilla-La Mancha.

Sánchez, for his part, said that he “respects the opinions expressed about the current political situation” by González, but added, “It is the PSOE Federal Committee that sets the PSOE’s line on the matter of the investiture of [PP Prime Minister Mariano] Rajoy.”

The anti-Sánchez faction, which is apparently drawn primarily from the top PSOE bureaucracy, have launched a bid to take over the party. They claim that the 17 resignations, plus 3 previous vacancies in the 35-seat Federal Executive, mean that Sánchez is no longer general secretary and that the PSOE should be handed over to a caretaker leadership.

In fact, Article 36 of the PSOE’s Federal Statutes specify that “when the vacancies in the Federal Executive affect the General Secretariat, or half plus one of its members, the Federal Committee must call for an Extraordinary Congress to elect the new Federal Executive.”

Yesterday, Sánchez therefore went on to call an extraordinary congress.

Conflicts inside the PSOE continued to escalate, however, as pro- and anti-Sánchez factions both claimed to control the party, and protests erupted outside PSOE headquarters in several cities. Andalucía PSOE chief Susana Díaz sent PSOE Federal Executive Committee President Verónica Pérez to PSOE headquarters in Madrid, where Pérez claimed she was now the “sole authority” in the PSOE. Pro-Sánchez officials barred her from entering the building, however, while PSOE members outside the building shouted “traitor” at her.

Most of the regional PSOE federations came out against Sánchez, while Catalonia, the Basque Country and Navarra came out in favour, with Catalan PSOE leader Miquel Iceta announcing plans to bus PSOE

members to Madrid to defend Sánchez.

Pro-PSOE daily *El País*, which has issued increasingly vitriolic denunciations of Sánchez in recent days, called him an “unscrupulous fool.” It explained that Sánchez was “breaking with the commitments to his party colleagues, who subordinate any internal move to the formation of a government”—that is, a regime of the PP and Rajoy.

González, *El País*, and the various PSOE factions fighting to install a PP government are trampling on the views of PSOE supporters and voters. A recent poll conducted by Metroscopia showed that 50 percent supported Sánchez’s “no” to Rajoy, while 43 percent preferred that the PSOE abstain and return the PP to power. This underlies both the hysterical tone and the contempt for legal procedures with which the anti-Sánchez faction is conducting their power grab.

It is highly significant that the power grab was launched by González, the PSOE’s main founder in the post-Franco era. González not only led the reconstruction of the party, with aid from German and French social democratic parties, but spearheaded the 1979 campaign during which the PSOE officially renounced Marxism and pledged its loyalty to capitalism.

The PSOE, like social democratic parties across Europe, is a party of bourgeois order. It has been discredited by years of austerity policies conducted by PSOE Prime Minister José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, who participated in the war in Afghanistan and launched deep attacks on the working class at home, especially in the years after the 2008 Wall Street crash.

González’s remark that he fears a crisis of rule in Spain reflects the growing anxiety gripping the Spanish and other ruling elites over the political situation in Europe. The European Union (EU) has not dared impose further austerity measures while Spain has no government, due to the EU’s growing unpopularity. Britain’s recent vote to exit the EU not only highlighted this unpopularity, but also made EU officials more reluctant to proceed quickly, given fears that politically explosive opposition could soon emerge.

They are determined, however, to obtain detailed pledges for more social cuts from Spain and Portugal at a conference slated for October. The PSOE would be more than happy to issue such pledges.

From the standpoint of workers, however, the war

and social policies of Sánchez are indistinguishable from those of González and the rest of the PSOE machine. He is simply pursuing a different tack to try to prevent a total collapse of the PSOE. He orients more to the pseudo-left Podemos party—the Spanish ally of the Syriza government in Greece, which is now infamous for its massive social cuts.

This manoeuvre is an attempt to give the PSOE a false image as a “left” opponent of the PP. It is, in fact, nothing of the sort, as its history shows. Moreover, it rapidly became clear yesterday that the political offensive launched by González had been coordinated with the PP. Yesterday, reports surfaced indicating that the PP caretaker government had known of plans to remove Sánchez as PSOE general secretary since last week, and that they were closely following the conflict inside the PSOE.

Details allegedly were passed on between caretaker Prime Minister Rajoy’s chief of staff Jorge Moragas and González’s former chief of staff, José Enrique Serrano. Caretaker Foreign Minister José Manuel García-Margallo has also boasted of his close ties with González and Zapatero.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact