

Putsch in Socialist Party exposes breakdown of Spanish democracy

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The recent putsch inside Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) was organized in order to bring to power a minority, right-wing Popular Party (PP) government. It has exposed the reactionary workings of the political system that emerged from Spain's Transition to parliamentary rule in 1978, after the death of fascist dictator Francisco Franco.

The Transition left the capitalist ruling class of the fascist regime in power, but the PSOE and other parties leading the Transition promised that it would nonetheless inaugurate a democratic regime. These promises have been shattered by the social and economic collapse across Europe since the 2008 financial crash, and the imposition of deep, unpopular austerity measures in Spain for nearly a decade. This has discredited the political system, so that two elections in December 2015 and June 2016 resulted in hung parliaments from which no governing majority emerged.

In September, behind the backs of the public, a small cabal of bankers, CEOs, intelligence agents, PP officials, and PSOE operatives conspired to oust General Secretary Pedro Sánchez in order to impose a PP government opposed by the majority of the Spanish people. The cabal was led by the former Prime Minister and PSOE General Secretary Felipe González, one of the leading figures in the Transition.

According to *La Información*, the “operation orchestrated by Susana Díaz and a group of [PSOE] chiefs to bring down Pedro Sanchez as PSOE general secretary is just the latest step in a manoeuvre which involved various actors: businessmen, intelligence services, former politicians and a large media company that owns one of Spain's most widely read newspapers and the most popular radio station (Prisa).”

The Prisa group is owner of daily *El País*, Spain's traditionally pro-PSOE “newspaper of record,” which spearheaded calls for Sánchez's resignation after he opposed attempts to install a minority PP government. *El País* was founded in 1976 by José Luís Cebrián, whose father Vicente was a top Franco regime official and the director of the fascist Falange's main publication, *Arriba*. José Luís Cebrián was also a personal friend of Felipe González, with whom he has written several books.

After nearly a year in which Spain had failed to form a government, fear was mounting in the bourgeoisie internationally. US President Barack Obama had visited Spain, calling for it to remain “strong and united” and “to reject the ‘us versus them’ mentality of some cynical politicians.” Under pressure from Brussels to implement more austerity, as well as from regional secessionist movements, the cabal feared that any further delay could provoke an open crisis of rule.

It planned the putsch in the days before the PSOE Federal Committee meeting which put an end to Sánchez's leadership. According to two different sources of *La Información*, González, Cebrián, and three top businessmen from IBEX, Spain's principal stock exchange, met to discuss the putsch.

One was César Alierta, former CEO of Telefónica, one of Spain's leading corporations and one of the world's largest telephone operators and mobile network providers, whom Sánchez has accused of being behind his ouster. The second was Isidro Fainé, CEO of La Caixa, a major

Spanish bank and shareholder of Prisa. The third was an unnamed CEO of an electric company.

These five individuals discussed sacking Sánchez, based on information from Spain's National Intelligence Agency (CNI), according to the sources of *La Información*. They allegedly feared “the possibility that Pedro Sanchez might form a government with [regional] separatists and Podemos. The numbers added up, the former general secretary of the PSOE had initiated contacts with the PNV [Basque Nationalist Party] and other secessionist formations.”

In this meeting, they agreed that Felipe González would initiate the operation against Sánchez, utilizing a radio interview with Prisa-owned Cadena SER. The interview, recorded two days before it aired, was the signal for 17 members of the PSOE Federal Executive to resign, to pressure Sánchez to leave.

In the interview, González denounced Sánchez's failure to back the PP, warning that it threatened to provoke a crisis of rule. “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 “frustrated” him. “A third set of elections would be madness, it could bring about a crisis of the system.”

According to another article in *La Información*, Alierta also met with Susana Díaz, who launched the campaign inside the PSOE, to tell her she would have the full backing of the two largest media groups in Spain: Prisa and Unidad Editorial, owner of *El Mundo* and *Expansión*.

During the whole operation, the interim PP government under acting Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy was kept continuously informed by internal PSOE sources. According to *Vozpópuli*, “The most direct of these was the periodic information delivered personally by Felipe Gonzalez to the acting prime minister, once both concluded that the June elections would not resolve political deadlock, and that they should therefore devote themselves to avoiding new elections before the expectant eyes of the financial establishment and major European decision-making centers.”

Sánchez rapidly fell, announcing his resignation and his loyalty to the González-Díaz faction, only days after the 17 PSOE Federal Committee members resigned. Two weeks later, the PSOE voted to abstain in a parliamentary vote in order to allow the PP to form a government.

Díaz has presented herself as candidate for the PSOE leadership in a congress to be held by next summer. Shortly after that news broke, it was also announced that Díaz will meet EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini, EU Parliament President Martin Schulz, and top officials including Economy Commissioner Pierre Moscovici and Regional Policy Commissioner Corina Cretu.

The putsch has laid bare the class forces served by the PSOE and the Spanish political system. It has shown how capitalist politicians, the media and the state machine ruthlessly do the bidding of the banks, corporations, and the leading imperialist powers. If elections do not produce the desired result—in this case, a right-wing government planning austerity, attacks on democratic rights and preparations for war—they

simply impose it. To do so, they are quite willing to toss aside small fry like Sánchez.

González's putsch also exposes the bankruptcy of PSOE allies like Unidos Podemos, which descends from the Stalinist and student radical forces that allied with the PSOE to block a revolutionary challenge from the working class to the fascist regime during the Transition. Podemos and various pseudo-left groupings in its orbit impotently criticized the putsch as a betrayal.

Revolutionary Left described the role of the PSOE in the coup as “a treachery without precedent to its members, to its electoral and social base, to the workers and the youth of the Spanish State.”

For Anticapitalistas, an organization close to France's New Anticapitalist Party that works inside Podemos, the putsch regrettably produced “great disaffection among many honest socialists for whom the idea of an alliance of their party with the PP was inconceivable.”

Claims that the González putsch and his close collaboration with the PP is a betrayal of the PSOE's principles are political lies. They are covering for the PSOE, with which they have worked for decades, and, more broadly, the entire political framework of the Transition.

As it emerged from its “renovation” under González during the Transition, the PSOE was a bourgeois party explicitly hostile to Marxism, working on a perspective of collaboration with the fascist regime. The decades of austerity and war suffered by workers under successive PSOE governments, and now the González putsch, are not accidents, but the organic product of this reactionary perspective.

In the PSOE's “renovation,” the rightward evolution of a counterrevolutionary social-democratic party intersected with the changing needs of US and European imperialism. During the Spanish Civil War provoked by Franco's military uprising against the Spanish Republic in 1936, the PSOE was part of the Popular Front government. The PSOE thus helped suppress repeated revolutionary uprisings of the Spanish working class, and led the Republic to defeat against Franco.

Banned by the fascist regime after the Civil War, the PSOE led by Rodolfo Llopió pinned its hopes on military intervention by the Allied imperialist powers against Franco after World War II. Its exile forces occasionally reminded European social-democrats of the criminality of Franco's regime, while in Spain it regrouped mainly middle-class intellectuals whose activities were tolerated by the authorities. This strategy ignominiously failed, however: European social-democrats were violently anti-communist and supported NATO's alliance with Franco.

The PSOE's subsequent shift was largely prepared by the Communist Party of Spain (PCE). A Stalinist party, that had played the lead role during the Civil War in murdering supporters of Trotsky who were fighting to give revolutionary leadership to the working class, it proposed to work outright with the fascist regime. In the 1950s, it adopted a line of “national reconciliation,” pledging to ally with anyone “wanting national reconciliation.” On this basis, it appealed for support inside the Catholic Church and Franco's police forces and army for “peaceful change” in Spain.

As the functionaries of the PSOE and PCE moved to the right, however, a revolutionary offensive was being prepared in the international working class. After ten million workers joined the May-June 1968 general strike in France, major strikes and mass demonstrations erupted across Europe and the entire world, mobilizing tens and hundreds of millions of workers.

Wave after wave of revolutionary struggles shattered the political order in Europe. Mass industrial action erupted in Germany and Italy in 1969 amid a broad radicalization of the youth. Mass strikes in 1972 and 1974 brought down the conservative Heath government in Britain. Dictatorships across southern Europe began to fall: a year after suppressing mass protests in 1973, the Greek junta of the colonels collapsed, the same year that the Carnation Revolution in Portugal brought down the fascist regime of Antonio Salazar.

The key element of the political situation, however, was the crisis of political leadership in the working class. While one government after another fell, nowhere did a revolutionary party lead the workers in the seizure of power. Rather, the bourgeoisie was able to utilise the Stalinist and social democratic parties, and their political defenders in the various Pabloite and state capitalist groups, to bring the situation back under control and so preserve capitalist rule.

As strike activity in Spain reached record levels, the Spanish bourgeoisie and the NATO alliance concluded that the Franco regime could not be saved simply by savage repression. They sought to somewhat broaden the social base of the regime beyond the most determined fascist elements in the ruling class. They used the incorporation of the PSOE and the PCE into the machinery of the Franco regime as the basis for creating a multi-party parliamentary set-up in Spain.

They turned to young PSOE “renovators” to mold the PSOE into a reliable instrument, a part of a political duopoly with the Francoite forces of what would become the PP. At the PSOE's Toulouse Congress of 1970, the “renovators” entered the scene. A then-unknown Felipe González attacked Llopió for isolating the PSOE in Europe by criticizing the Franco regime: “you remind Europe of what they don't want. You remind our socialist colleagues what they want to forget. You, who struggled for democracy, do not represent it anymore.”

González's renovators ousted the old leadership in the PSOE's Suresnes Congress in 1974, amid the revolutionary crisis in neighboring Portugal. Years later it was revealed that CESED, the Francoite intelligence service, regularly met with the renovators and provided González and other delegates with passports to travel to Suresnes. Passports were invariably denied to opponents of the regime.

The “renovated” PSOE received extensive support from European social democrats, especially the French Socialist Party. Other key forces in supporting the PSOE were the US State Department and Germany's Social Democratic Party, which paid the PSOE for full-time staff, rent, training, conferences and González's trips around Europe via its Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

Along with the Francoites' links with the PSOE, the PCE also grew rapidly. The PCE's “national reconciliation” policy was renamed the “Pact for Liberty” in 1974, allowing the PCE to forge new alliances not only with sections of the social democrats, but also with the royalist Carlist Party and with the Catholic sect Opus Dei.

The Francoite authorities tolerated the subsequent campaign to promote González, while the PSOE advised King Juan Carlos and Adolfo Suárez on the steps to take toward parliamentary democracy. Despite his personal anticommunist convictions, González urged them to legalize the PCE and the trade unions, which he knew served to block mass workers struggles in Spain of the late 1970s from evolving into the revolutionary overthrow of the regime, after Franco's death in 1975.

The *Financial Times* of London, the authoritative voice of European finance capital, admitted in December 1978 that the PCE, “which controls the majority trade union confederation CC.OO and the best organized political party in Spain,” had been “crucial in some of the most tense moments of the transition. The active moderation showed by the communists ... was decisive in order to avoid that Spain fall into an abyss of civil conflict and to allow the continuation of reforms.”

The PSOE formally and demonstratively renounced Marxism in 1979 as it prepared to take office within the Franco regime. In 1979, González announced that he was “no longer a Marxist” and called for the removal of references to Marxism in the PSOE's statutes. In its 28th Congress, that same year, the PSOE officially renounced Marxism.

González had never been a Marxist, of course. However, this statement aimed both to shift the political atmosphere to the right, and to prepare the PSOE for holding power. González made clear that the attack on Marxism was closely connected to his aim of demobilizing social struggle. Soon

after the 28th Congress, he declared, “the Party has an obligation, in this historic moment, to be a source of tranquility for society, transcending the boundaries of the Party itself.”

As soon as he took office in 1982, González assiduously carried through the demands of the banks and big business, dismantling existing national regulations rooted in the autarkic character of the Franco regime, and orienting to the EU. González also led Spain into official membership in NATO, the EU, and the negotiations setting up the euro zone; under González, much of the capitalist oligarchy that had profited from the Franco regime became adamant PSOE supporters.

Several decades later, González has again organized an operation to whip the PSOE into line with the needs of the banks and of NATO. Now, however, the PSOE is discredited by its anti-worker record under González and PSOE Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero. González' putsch against Sánchez—worked out in backroom deals with big business, the intelligence services, and the Spanish right—is not an accident or a betrayal of the PSOE's principles. It is the expression of the PSOE's historic role over the last half century as an instrument of capitalist rule.

The exposure of the class forces served by the PSOE also exposes the reactionary class orientation of Podemos. They do not oppose, but rather defend the system that emerged from the Transition. While González and Díaz plotted behind the scenes, Podemos was claiming that the only alternative to a PP-led government was a progressive, PSOE-Podemos “Government of Change.”

Representing the confluence of postmodernism and Spanish Stalinism after it supported the Soviet bureaucracy's restoration of capitalism in the USSR, Podemos works entirely in the reactionary historical and political framework of the Transition. They are insisting that they plan to rule in future governments together with the PSOE.

Speaking to Spanish public television this month, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias said that his party would “commit a grave mistake” if it succumbed “to the temptation” of attacking the PSOE like a “bird of prey.”

“It's important to work like ants, to be the good opposition,” he said, adding: “We will progressively consolidate our position. We will need to reach agreements with the PSOE in order to arrive at a situation where we can rule.”

In whatever a coalition government Podemos would form with the PSOE, they would serve as tools of the same reactionary corporate and military-intelligence interests defended by González.



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