

Pablo Iglesias re-elected as Podemos general secretary at Vistalegre II congress

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Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias won the internal leadership contest yesterday at the Vistalegre conference in Madrid, amid a bitter faction fight pitting his supporters against those of former Political Secretary Íñigo Errejón. A temporary truce has been declared, as all factions insist on the need for unity to prevent these conflicts from blowing the party apart.

In a party which has 456,814 members on paper, only 155,275, or 35 percent, voted in the contest. Even among members classified as “active,” participation only reached 53 percent, according to pro-Podemos *Cuarto Poder*.

Iglesias obtained 60.03 percent of the places in the leadership, with 36.5 percent for Errejón and 3.1 for the Anticapitalistas faction led by Miguel Urbán. This will mean that the Citizens Council, Podemos’ highest decision-making organ, will have 37 of the 62 places staked with Iglesias’ followers, 23 for Errejón and 2 for the Anticapitalistas, led by Miguel Urbán.

In the leadership contest pitting Iglesias against Juan Moreno Yagüe for general secretary, Iglesias obtained 128,700 votes, 89 percent of the total, against Yagüe’s 15,700. This means that, regardless of the differences between the two factions, the Errejonistas voted for Iglesias—as they said they would before the conference.

The Errejonistas hoped Iglesias’ bid to reelection would not succeed if their documents were passed instead of those of Iglesias.

Iglesias will now have a free hand to form the new leadership, and Errejón’s future is uncertain. Iglesias has said he will keep Errejón in the executive organ, but Errejón is set to lose his positions as political secretary and parliamentary spokesman.

In the aftermath, Errejón said he would not resign, adding that there “has been a force that emerges with a clear majority, but there is a clear mandate for

plurality,” that is, for Errejón to remain as the leader of a faction representing a third of the party.

The congress opened on Saturday morning with all three factions toning down their bitter attacks on each other. *El País* wrote, “The escalation of tension, crossfire and dirty war of the preceding days to the congress of Vistalegre 2 augured a conclave of battle and total war. What happened on the first day, however, was the emergence of a truce between Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón, who avoided their dispute and endeavored to tone it down, under pressure from demands for unity among the membership.”

In his opening speech, Iglesias warned against internal conflict, stating that “self-absorption and division works for the enemy.” He added, “We have made many mistakes, but today and tomorrow this assembly will be an example of unity, fraternity and intelligence. ... To talk about my project for the general secretary is to talk about Íñigo Errejón and Miguel Urbán. Comrades, I seek your support.”

In his intervention to defend the main political resolution of his faction, Iglesias said that to reach government in the next elections, it is necessary to win “social victories not only electoral ones.” In this he called for a Podemos which “does not look like Citizens or the PSOE,” if not “like Spain, like the people who work, the people who bring forth our country.” He called for Podemos to “lead a historical block of change” against the PP government.

Iglesias’ document calls for continuing “to build the historical, social and popular bloc [...] that makes politics in institutions and in non-institutional public spaces at the same time.” This is to be accomplished, according to Iglesias and his supporters, by deepening alliances with the Stalinist-led United Left (IU), social movements and activists.

The document states that Podemos’ “representatives in the institutions cannot transform themselves into politicians,” because if “we subordinate ourselves to the logic of institutions, we will dissolve ourselves.”

Next was Íñigo Errejón, who also claimed that “from Monday onwards, Podemos will have unity.” In his short intervention, Errejón criticized the PSOE for declaring that its enemy is Podemos’ populism, “which is what they call change.”

Errejón toned down his political orientation to the PSOE, which is clearly expressed in his document. The document states, “It is vitally important to maintain the political initiative to be able to move in the tension of dragging the PSOE beyond the positions it is willing to take on its own will: that is, break with austerity and favor a more just [economic] recovery.”

Errejón also abandoned his insistence on solely focusing in parliamentary activity, though his document states that the way to show Podemos is “a political force with future” is to “regain the initiative to demonstrate that we are capable of pressuring the government, leading agreements and inserting policies in the national agenda” through parliament.

Errejón concluded by claiming his is a “patriotic project” for all people, including those who did not vote for Podemos.

Anticapitalistas emerged as the staunchest defenders of unity. Urbán repeatedly called for unity, saying, “We are not here to choose internal enemies.” He added, “In Vistalegre we are partners. Our enemies are out there and are very powerful,” alluding to “the ghosts of fascism” such as Donald Trump or Marine Le Pen: “The antidote against these fascisms is called Podemos.”

Anticapitalistas called for writing back into Podemos’ program some of the for-show demands that it has abandoned in recent years, like “fighting for a public bank and against an unfair tax policy.”

The three factions’ positions reflect nothing more than divergent strategies to strengthen Podemos’ weight inside the state machine despite the exposure of its reactionary policies, and to suppress opposition in the working class. Claims that these conflicts reflect differences of principle or of class orientation are political frauds. None of the factions offer an alternative to Podemos’ bankrupt policies, and all share the same anti-Marxist policy and anti-worker

orientation.

Even Podemos’ defenders—such as Revolutionary Left, an organization operating in the Stalinist IU alliance that supports Iglesias—had to admit that little separated the different factions.

Its article titled “The Differences between Iglesias and Errejón, a Reflection of the Class Struggle,” which began by insisting that the conflicts between “Iglesias and Errejón express in the final analysis the pressures of different social classes in society,” was forced to conclude, “Apparently, from an ideological point of view, there do not appear to be substantial differences between Pablo Iglesias and Íñigo Errejón. Neither poses an alternative that goes beyond capitalism, both defend a narrow nationalism ...”

It is precisely for this reasons that Revolutionary Left, along with pseudo-left outfits like Anticapitalistas working within or orbiting around Podemos, defend this organization and have rallied to the call of “the unity of both wings.”

This conflict, as the WSWs has noted, in fact “exposes the bankruptcy of Podemos’ populist, nationalist and pro-capitalist politics, theoretically rooted in a postmodernist rejection of Marxism and the revolutionary role of the working class by affluent layers of the middle class.”

For Errejón’s temporarily defeated supporters, the way forward is to move visibly and rapidly to the right—abandoning any radical-sounding slogans, forming alliances with the PSOE or the right, and integrating themselves into the state based on nationalism, populism and gender politics. They fear that the “back to the streets” campaign of Iglesias and Anticapitalistas, consisting in staging media interventions in workers’ struggles coordinated with the union bureaucracy, might accidentally provoke protests that could escalate out of their control.



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