

Small turnouts for Podemos-led demonstrations in Spain

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For two consecutive weekends, demonstrations called by the pseudo-left Podemos, the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) and the two main Spanish trade unions, CCOO and UGT, have failed to attract support.

The demonstrations were billed as a highlight of the “back to the streets” campaign initiated after the installation of a minority Popular Party (PP) government six months ago. Their failure indicates a deep disillusionment by workers and youth in these rightward lurching organisations.

On March 25, demonstrations called by Podemos in over 40 cities and towns against poverty and the PP government were a fiasco. Just a few hundred supporters, according to media reports, turned out compared to the 300,000 that were mobilized for its March for Change in January 2015.

A week later, on April 1, some 70 organizations, including the trade unions, IU, the Pabloite Anti-capitalists, and some Podemos sections, joined the call by Coordinator 25-S, which emerged in 2012 out of the *indignados* movement, to protest last week’s 2017 budget debate in Congress.

The result was equally disastrous, with just a few hundred people turning up in Madrid. In comparison, the same coalition was able to mobilise in 2012 tens of thousands against the PP government’s austerity measures.

The “back to the streets” campaign consists of stage-managed protests and interventions in workers’ struggles in an attempt to falsely present Podemos and the unions as oppositional forces, when they have demobilised opposition to years of austerity measures. The campaign is attempting to divert escalating social anger behind a bankrupt, nationalist perspective aimed at reversing the decline in electoral support for Unidos Podemos—the alliance of Podemos and the IU—while

covering for the discredited unions. Above all, it aims to block the emergence of a politically independent movement in the working class for socialism.

At the same time as unions are supporting and even calling some token protests, they are negotiating new attacks on the working class. In December, the CCOO and UGT marched alongside IU and Podemos in Madrid, announcing the start of a campaign to reverse cuts. At the end of last month, union leaders proclaimed to the media an agreement with the government for a 1 percent increase in public sector wages and the conversion of 300,000 temporary public sector jobs into permanent contracts. Similar negotiations are taking place in the private sector.

This occurs as inflation hit a four-year high of 3 percent in February, with half a million public sectors jobs destroyed since the 2008 economic crisis started.

At the same time as the unions were trumpeting their agreement with the government, the CETM union carried out a massive betrayal of a militant struggle by dockworkers—agreeing to wage cuts (latest reports suggest 10 percent) and huge job losses in the form of early retirement schemes.

Podemos and IU have come into ever more open conflict with the working class and youth, even as they steadily acquire lucrative positions in the capitalist state.

Podemos and IU, alongside the Socialist Party (PSOE), played a crucial role in the betrayal of the dockworkers. Their voting down of the PP’s original legislation to cut wages and jobs through abolishing the dock labour scheme was a manoeuvre to prevent a major port strike. The *World Socialist Web Site* explained that this threatened to “trigger far broader struggles in the working class—ending the ‘social peace’ overseen by the unions, potentially bringing

down the PP government and doing irreparable damage to their economic and political interests.”

The 2017 budget is also the political responsibility of Unidos Podemos. The PP’s ability to get its austerity measures passed and to comply with the European Union’s budgetary limits is due to the €7 billion cuts in Spain’s cities and towns, of which €2.3 billion were imposed by Podemos-backed “Cities of Change.”

These include the major urban population centres Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Zaragoza, Cadiz and Santiago de Compostela.

These actions are just the latest examples of Podemos’ track record. Last year, its pursuit of a “Government of Change,” a proposed coalition with the discredited PSOE, resulted in a loss of nearly 1 million votes compared to the 2015 elections. Workers and youth refused to cast their vote for a party that had no real differences with the austerity policies of the EU and European social democracy.

After the elections produced a hung parliament, sections of the ruling class orchestrated a coup within the PSOE, ousting its elected leader Pedro Sanchez, in order to allow the installation of a PP government. In the process, Podemos’s ally was shown to be what it has always been, a party of the financial aristocracy.

One crisis after another has emerged within Podemos. Last year tensions broke out between the Errejonista wing led, by the former number two, Iñigo Errejon, and the Pablista wing led by party leader Pablo Iglesias. Errejon is for moving openly and rapidly to the right and fears that the Pablista “back to the streets” campaign could accidentally unleash protests that could escalate out of control. However, nothing of principle separates the Pablistas and Errejonistas. Their disagreements are over how best to suppress opposition in the working class, whether through token protests in alliance with the trade unions or by avoiding any and all social mobilisations in favour of purely electoral and parliamentary action.

No sooner had a temporary truce been agreed at Podemos’s Vistalegre II Congress in February than new tensions erupted in Andalusia, where the party’s Pabliste leader Teresa Rodríguez is demanding her regional affiliate be delinked from the control of Madrid. In Catalonia, the Podemos section—against Iglesias’s wishes—has refused to join the new pseudo-left coalition Comuns led by Barcelona’s mayor Ada

Colau. In Valencia, Podemos’s regional leader announced he would not present himself for re-election, attacking the Madrid leadership “for unproductive ambitions.”

The lack of support for Podemos’s token protests has also exposed all the pseudo-left forces, which aggressively intervened to push through Iglesias’s re-election at the Vistalegre II congress, claiming it was an expression of the party’s “turn to the left.”

Izquierda Revolucionaria (Revolutionary Left, IR), the Spanish section of the Committee for a Workers’ International, is integrated into IU and Podemos. It declared, “Pablo Iglesias makes a decisive victory in Vistalegre II. It’s time to return to the mobilisation in the streets!”

IR proudly described how they intervened to support Iglesias at the congress, “delivering more than 6,000 pamphlets,” “selling hundreds of copies of its newspaper *El Militante*” and receiving the “support and congratulations of many comrades in Podemos.” IR concluded by urging Iglesias and his collaborators to “call for immediate mobilisation, to prepare a general strike.”

Barely a few weeks later, in its April editorial, IR was expressing concern at how Podemos failed to garner support for its March 25 demonstrations, declaring they were “an example of what not to do.” They advised Podemos leaders: “A call which is only known in the social networks (Facebook and Twitter), and lacks the militant impulse from the workplaces, universities, neighbourhoods, is also condemned [to fail]. Podemos has to take note: we cannot do these things like this.”

These forces are now planning “Dignity Marches,” another token protest for May 27, against the PP and organised by Podemos and the union bureaucracies.

The “Back to the Streets” demonstrations are in reality further proof that Podemos does not offer a progressive alternative to the collapsing two-party system in Spain. It is a bourgeois party, against which a ruthless political struggle is required.



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