

Leadership contest begins in Spain's Socialist Party

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) has announced the primary election for the party's general secretary will be held on May 21. Candidates will have to be endorsed by at least 5 percent of the party's 180,000 members before May 4.

The PSOE has been without a leader since October, when an internal coup orchestrated by a cabal of bankers, the intelligence services and the media ousted general secretary Pedro Sánchez. Organized by former PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González and *El País* editor-in-chief Juan Luis Cebrián, the objective was to install a Popular Party (PP) government after Spain had been without a proper administration for almost 10 months—something opposed by the Sánchez faction of the PSOE.

The coup 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.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted, “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.”

The coup, however, has not resolved the crisis of bourgeois rule. The PP minority government, supported by little more than a third of the parliament, is weak and unpopular. Moreover, it is embroiled in one corruption scandal after another, implementing savage austerity measures, drastically increasing the military

budget and is divided over whether to orient towards Berlin and the European Union or the US under the aggressively nationalist and protectionist Trump administration. To pass laws, the PP government depends on the direct support of the PSOE in parliament.

The question now being fought out between the main contenders in the PSOE leadership contest—ousted PSOE former leader Sánchez and current state premier of Andalusia, Susana Díaz—is whether the PSOE should continue propping up the PP minority government, or whether the PSOE should dress itself up as a “left” alternative by allying with the pseudo-left Podemos in preparation for the PP's possible collapse.

Although both candidates have called for unity, the differences are such that they threaten to break up the party. HSBC economist Fabio Balboni has stated, “Depending on who wins, we could see a shift of the party to the left (Pedro Sánchez) or the centre (Susana Díaz), with a risk of a possible party split and, particularly in the first case, a tougher opposition to the PP-minority government.”

Díaz is the clear favourite of the ruling class, with the backing of virtually all the media, the support of the PSOE interim committee (supposedly a neutral organ in the power struggle), previous PSOE prime ministers, including her mentor González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, and dozens of former ministers and regional premiers.

During the coup against Sánchez, she played the leading role in attacking him, defending an abstention to allow the PP to come to power for “the good of Spain.”

Díaz has accused Sánchez of being Podemos' lackey in the PSOE, claiming that if he wins, the PSOE will be handed over to Podemos: “It's one thing to forge pacts

and another to give yourself over to someone else or even imitate them,” Díaz said in a rally. She has vowed, “to struggle against ... populism [i.e., Podemos] and regional separatism.”

The Sánchez faction calculates that the continued survival of the PSOE depends on the incorporation of the pseudo-left Podemos into a PSOE-led “left alliance” government—as he had attempted to do before the coup against him—in order to control the working class. He has also called for “unity of action” with the trade unions and other “left” forces.

Sánchez represents factions of the ruling class who are concerned that the PSOE, one of the pillars of the post-Franco era, will be destroyed—as has its social democratic equivalents in Greece, PASOK, and France, the Socialist Party (PS)—if it continues its support for the PP. The PSOE has already suffered disastrous results in national elections, dropping from 44 percent of the popular vote in 2008 to its current 22 percent.

Sánchez made this clear in a recent interview when he said, “I am especially concerned about the lack of trust that exists between our members and part of the leadership. And I think our project can humbly repair those wounds. It can rebuild the lost unity between the militants and the leaders, and also the credibility lost to our voters.”

Díaz opposes an alliance with Podemos, despite its pronounced shift to the right; for fear that such an alliance might still serve to arouse left-wing anti-capitalist sentiments in broader layers of the population that neither the PSOE nor Podemos would be able to control. She has even attempted to use the disastrous results of the PSOE’s French counterparts in the April 23 presidential elections as an example of failure resulting from adopting “radical policies”!

Díaz declared, “We should learn from that [the French Socialist Party’s results], when radical positions are taken, people punish us, move away from us.”

Díaz omitted any mention of the fact that the Socialist Party’s (PS) meltdown in France, with its presidential candidate Benoît Hamon winning barely more than six percent of the vote, is due to the hatred engendered by the current PS government’s austerity measures, warmongering and attacks on democratic rights. The PSOE’s own pro-austerity track record includes the programme implemented by her regional government in Andalusia, one of the poorest regions in Spain, with

the second highest unemployment level at 28 percent.

Sánchez is in no position to attack his foes’ austerity measures or those implemented previously by the PSOE governments—voting for them as a parliamentarian in 2009-2011.

Sánchez and Díaz are also fighting over the question of how to deal with the nationalist forces that control the region of Catalonia, one of the wealthiest in Spain, who are pledged to hold a referendum on independence this year, illegal under the Spanish constitution.

Díaz is a hardliner. She has publicly stated, “There will be no referendum” because “it goes against the law”—the same position held by the PP government. Sánchez, on the contrary, defends giving symbolic concessions, such as Catalonia being recognized as a “nation” in the country’s constitution. Sánchez has also defended the federalist proposal of the PSOE’s sister Catalan Socialist Party.

Regardless of the differences, both candidates agree that the minority PP government should remain in power as long as possible. Last month, Sánchez said in an interview, “We can say no to Rajoy without the need to put forward a no confidence vote”, and that “we cannot call for new elections once again”.

Last week, he described the no confidence proposal, put forward by Podemos in parliament because of the latest corruption scandals of the PP, as making “no sense” and called on Rajoy to resign to save his government.

Podemos has called for support for Sánchez. Its leader Pablo Iglesias has said that he would aim to negotiate with the PSOE to form a government, declaring, “If you are in politics, it is to rule.”

Podemos’ no confidence vote, impossible to win without the support of the PSOE, which has dismissed the Podemos initiative as “irresponsible fireworks”, also aims at exposing the PSOE’s pro-PP line, while bolstering the positions of Sánchez within the PSOE to pave its own path to government on behalf of Spanish capital.



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