

Podemos no-confidence vote in Rajoy aimed at preserving bourgeois rule in Spain

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Just four months after coming to power as a minority government with the help of the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Citizens party, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) administration is beset by yet another corruption scandal.

According to the latest survey, 45 percent of voters say corruption is one of the three main problems facing Spain, an increase of almost 10 points since January.

The revelations in the "Caso Lezo" (Lezo Case) show once again the outright criminality that lay at the heart of the country's now-shipwrecked real estate-based economic boom. It is the latest in a long list of corruption scandals affecting one major Spanish institution after another.

Interlocking criminal networks of politicians, public prosecutors, judges, journalists, royalty and corporate executives have expanded their wealth since the 2007 economic crash, whilst brutal austerity has been meted out to the mass of the Spanish population under the mantra of "we all have to sacrifice something". Rajoy himself has been called to testify in the "Gürtel Case", which involves widespread bribery of PP officials in exchange for government contracts.

The central figure in the Lezo Case is Ignacio González, who was president of the Madrid regional government from 2012 to 2015, and is now in prison awaiting trial. González is accused of using his control of Madrid's water system and largest public enterprise, Canal Isabel II, to funnel kickbacks on contracts in Spain and abroad into his Swiss bank account. He is also accused of embezzling one million euros from the Madrid regional government's coffers to finance the PP.

Justice Minister Rafael Catalá and Spain's chief anti-corruption prosecutor, Manuel Moix, have also been accused of attempting to protect González from investigation.

The fallout from the Lezo Case has led to the

resignation of former Madrid regional president Esperanza Aguirre from leadership of the PP group in the city's parliament. Although she has not been personally linked to the scandal, Aguirre said she had failed to properly supervise González, her protégé and successor, as regional president.

The pseudo-left party Podemos is exploiting the scandal to divert anger amongst workers and youth at yet another corruption case into an appeal to the capitalist state to clean up its own activities and bolster illusions in the PSOE.

Soon after the Lezo Case broke, Podemos announced its intention to call a no-confidence vote in Rajoy, arguing, in the words of its leader Pablo Iglesias, "the corruption of the PP is a virus which affects all the institutions of our homeland [patria]". Iglesias announced the party would present an "independent" candidate, that is, one not associated with Podemos, although no one has yet been named.

Iglesias announced ten measures that Podemos will present along with the no confidence vote directed at "regeneration and the fight against corruption", in order to "clean up" Spain.

Five of the measures relate to corruption—the repeal of the "Berlusconi law", which limits investigation of corruption cases, a pledge to "untie the hands of the regulators" and stop the "revolving doors" between the state and big business, an "end to bank secrecy", "control of the financing of political parties" and an increase in penalties for corruption and economic crimes.

Iglesias made a direct appeal to sections of the state apparatus, declaring, "it is a democratic problem that there are police, civil guards, prosecutors and judges who are afraid of the government because it puts pressure on them."

The illusion that capitalism can be purged of its corruption was exposed a century ago by the Russian

revolutionary Vladimir Lenin, who described the imperialist epoch as a stage in which finance capital dominates society, headed by a “new financial aristocracy” characterized by “corruption, bribery on a huge scale and all kinds of fraud.”

Since then, these processes have vastly expanded to the point, as the 2008 global crash proved, whereby a criminal financial elite bestrides the world economy, pocketing unimaginable sums by means of speculation and parasitism and operating outside of any legal restraint.

Podemos included other measures to demonstrate its fiscal responsibility to the ruling elite: they would “bring more money in to spend better”, and “rationalize the path of reducing the public deficit”.

To cover up for this pro-capitalist appeal, a handful of unspecified social measures, including “better quality employment”, “guaranteed minimum income” and a new pensions reform were thrown in.

Iglesias stated that he would present the no confidence vote even if it does not obtain enough parliamentary support, “because it’s an ethical imperative”. To succeed in the Spanish parliamentary system, a motion of no confidence in the head of government must secure a majority in favour —176 out of the 350 deputies.

Since the PP has only 137 deputies, a vote of no confidence by the opposition parties could easily bring it down. However, both the PSOE with 85 seats and the Citizens Party with 32 seats—which have acted as the main props of the PP minority in parliament—have so far closed ranks with Rajoy.

The PSOE has dismissed the Podemos move as irresponsible political “fireworks”, and the Citizens Party called it a “circus stunt”.

By tabling a no confidence vote, Podemos is stoking illusions in the PSOE, around which it has built its hopes of coming to power though a so-called “Government of Change”, particularly involving the faction around Pedro Sánchez. To that end, Podemos is postponing a decision on when to hold the no confidence vote until after the May 21 primary election for a new PSOE leader.

Sánchez—ousted as general secretary last October for refusing to abstain in the congressional vote to allow Rajoy to form a new government—is standing in the election. With little backing from the party hierarchy and media, he received 57,000 nominations, compared with the 63,000 for Andalusian leader Susana Díaz, who was a key figure in the coup against him.

During his campaign, Sánchez, who has no programmatic differences with Díaz, promoted himself as

a born-again party dissident who should have done more to reach an agreement with Podemos last year. When the nominations were announced, Sánchez said he was “overwhelmed” by the support he had received, declaring, “I believe we are standing on the threshold of a new party that is going to leave behind the days when things were decided by a handful of people, and become a party where everyone gets to decide.”

However, Sánchez has dismissed Iglesias’ initiative, declaring, “I do not discard anything at the moment, but the most important thing right now is to demand Rajoy’s resignation”—in other words, saving the PP government by sacrificing Rajoy.

Podemos is virtually indistinguishable from the PSOE in terms of its pro-capitalist programme and its imperialist foreign policy. For the past three years, it has invested huge amounts of energy in promoting itself as a party capable of serving the bourgeoisie. It cheered Syriza’s austerity measures in Greece, making clear its readiness to facilitate the imposition of similar attacks in Spain. In the local administrations controlled or backed by Podemos, the party has assiduously implemented austerity, broken strikes and supported police measures against migrants. Its main critique of the PP is encapsulated in Iglesias’ words: “The PP is not only corrupt, but is also inefficient in its economic policy.”

Podemos aims at better serving the interests of the ruling class, without the discredited corrupt baggage of the PP. Iglesias has now junked his previous criticisms of the “caste” in favour of an alliance with “patriotic businessmen” against an alleged plot between big business and politicians.

In the words of Podemos leader Juan Carlos Monedero, “Against these pirates, we have to support ‘patriotic’ business, those people who create 80 percent of employment in Spain [...] who pay taxes here and have a country project, something that both the PSOE and the PP have lost sight of while they sell away Spain cheaply.”



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