

Sánchez aims to save Spain's Socialist Party from collapse

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17 May 2017

Former general secretary of the Socialist Party (PSOE), Pedro Sánchez, is attempting to save the party from discrediting itself and disappearing as one of the main parties of capitalist rule in Spain. Sánchez is posing as a left alternative to the right-wing candidate and current regional premier of Andalusia, Susana Díaz, in the party's leadership contest.

Eight months ago, Sánchez was ousted from the post of general secretary. His ouster was carried out by a small cabal of bankers, CEOs, intelligence agents, Popular Party (PP) officials and PSOE operatives led by the former prime minister and PSOE general secretary Felipe González, assisted by Díaz, because he did not agree to abstain in a parliamentary vote allowing the PP to return to power. Ever since, the PSOE has supported the PP directly or indirectly in parliament.

Faced with the coup, Sánchez decided to resign as general secretary in October, without even attempting to oppose the coup plotters. Weeks later, he resigned his seat in parliament to avoid voting against the PSOE's decision to support the PP. He virtually disappeared from the political scene overnight.

Sánchez was then resurrected. He lacks any significant political track record, besides supporting the PSOE's austerity measures as a parliamentarian in 2009-2011. Parachuted into leadership in 2014 by the same political forces which ousted him two years later, Sánchez announced his bid for leadership in late January. He proceeded to make public appearances at which he sang *The Internationale* with his fist clenched.

The faction backing Sánchez, supported by "left" media publications including *Público* and *Eldiario.org*, represents sections of the ruling class seeking to preserve the PSOE from being destroyed like its

counterparts in Greece (PASOK) and France (Socialist Party). The latter collapsed after implementing brutal austerity, supporting imperialist wars and attacking democratic rights. 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.

The PSOE is one of the main pillars of the post-Franco era. Under its leadership, Spain became a member of the European Union, NATO and the euro currency. Successive PSOE governments also implemented the first waves of labour and pension reforms, deindustrialization policies, privatisations and crackdown on democratic rights. Under its leadership, the Spanish army was sent on its first missions in US-led wars in the former Yugoslavia and the Middle East, the first foreign interventions since the World War II.

After the world capitalist crisis erupted in 2008, the PSOE government implemented a wave of austerity, reaching its zenith when it enshrined unending austerity by including a new article in the constitution (Article 135) that prioritizes the repayment of debts over social expenditure.

These policies and the ensuing rise in unemployment, especially among youth, have led to a situation where broad layers of the population are completely hostile to the PSOE as part of the entire political establishment. A European Union-sponsored survey titled "Generation What?" revealed that 63 percent of youth in Spain—a figure similar to other European countries—would "actively participate in a large-scale uprising against the generation in power if it happened in the next days or months."

In this context, Sánchez is desperately intervening to control this anger by posing as a reborn PSOE dissident and dressing up the PSOE in a "left" garb. In this, he is

aided and abetted by the pseudo-left Podemos, which aims to preserve the PSOE as its ally in an alternative “Government of Change.” Grasping at Sánchez’s “rebirth” to spread the illusion that the PSOE still has some life left in it, Podemos has utilized the latest corruption scandal surrounding the PP, the Lezo case, to call for a parliamentary no confidence vote against PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy after the installation of a new PSOE leader.

There is a possibility that Sánchez might win the leadership contest. The forecast that Díaz would crush Sánchez by overwhelming him with tens of thousands of endorsements by party members proved false. Instead, the result was close. Díaz won 62,582 endorsements, compared to 57,369 for Sánchez.

The result has sparked rising concern at the possibility of a Sánchez victory in the election on May 21 and its consequences for the stability of the current minority PP government, which depends on the PSOE’s support in parliament.

The PP has already confirmed that if Sánchez is elected, and withdraws the PSOE’s support for the government, the PP will call a snap election, the third in 18 months.

Such a looming scenario would create an unprecedented political crisis, amid rising international geopolitical tensions—the threatened breakup of the EU post-Brexit and the drive to secession by Catalan nationalist parties, which are threatening to hold an independence referendum at the end of this year. At the same time, Spain still has to comply with its austerity obligations and continue its attacks on the working class.

Sánchez has been targeted for attack in numerous editorials and opinion pieces for currying favour with Podemos and the Catalan separatists, which intensified after the high number of endorsements. In response, he has shifted to emphasise his political loyalty.

Previously, he had campaigned for “unity of action” with Podemos and the trade unions. Now, he talks about a more ambiguous “social alliance for progress” and “a reformist project” in opposition to the “breakaway” one cited by Podemos. His programme also insists on the “defence of the Spanish nation,” while recognising Spain’s “plurinationality,” playing down his previous support for a federal state structure.

This has been noted by the bourgeois press, with

leading articles titled “Pedro Sánchez keeps his distance from the ‘break away’ [project] of Podemos” (*El País*), “Sánchez removes the pacts with Podemos” (*El Confidencial*), “Pedro Sánchez does not want to make pacts with Podemos” (ABC), and “Sánchez rectifies and eliminates the alliance with Podemos from his programme” (*La Razón*).

Podemos continues to be at the centre of the debate in the PSOE. Despite its pronounced shift to the right, implementation of austerity in the town councils it controls, the numerous pledges to defend the capitalist system and the integration of judges, policemen and former generals into its leadership, factions of the ruling class continue to see Podemos as unreliable.

Although the pose of Podemos as an oppositional force is, like that of their potential ally Sánchez, bogus—meant to act as a lightning rod for social discontent to preserve the stability of Spanish capitalism—the bourgeoisie want no hint of a shift away from austerity. They fear this might arouse expectations in the working class that Podemos will not be able to control and that any concessions to Spain’s varied separatist movements threaten the integrity of the state.

Sánchez has also answered the media cry over the possibility that the close PSOE leadership contest could split the party in two. He said that if he wins he would maintain party unity and be “loyal” to the regional party barons that continue to oppose his leadership.

Further, he stated that he does not support Podemos’ call for a no confidence vote. Instead, he suggested that Rajoy resign in an attempt to save the PP-led government and maintain the ability of the PSOE to vote with it in parliament. He has never publicly stated what the PSOE led by him would do in opposition—a clear warning that it will continue with its programme of austerity and war.



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