

Spanish Socialist Party Prime Minister Sánchez appoints right-wing cabinet

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Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has chosen an executive for his new minority Socialist Party (PSOE) government that will impose the austerity demanded by big business and international financial institutions, while aggressively pursuing a militarist foreign policy.

The PSOE government took office after a no confidence vote two weeks ago, supported by the pseudo-left Podemos and regional nationalists, who ousted the minority right-wing Popular Party (PP) government.

Initially the newly-installed PSOE government was condemned by the media as an inherently unstable “Frankenstein” regime, reduced to just 84 seats in the 350-seat Congress and held hostage by Podemos and the nationalists. Sánchez was told to hold elections as soon as possible—something PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy refused to do.

However, the mood has changed within ruling circles. Daily *El País* went from describing the Sánchez government as “unviable” to “a good cabinet” just one week later.

On Sunday it expressed the real reasons behind this change: “The main task of PM Sanchez is not to execute the programme of his party, for which he does not have a majority, but to begin to repair the political, social and institutional destruction caused by the Popular Party Government, so that the country goes to the next electoral appointment with stability To demand the new PM call for snap elections now is as inappropriate as to demand that he exhaust the legislature.”

Nationally and internationally, the media has focused on the record number of female ministers in Sánchez’s new cabinet—11 out of 17—saying it is supposedly a sign of the new government’s progressive policies. Sánchez described his new team as one sharing “the same vision of a progressive society that was both modernising and pro-European.”

What lies behind all the talk of Sánchez’s “feminisation

of politics” are advanced preparations to attack the working class. His policy announcements, along with the ministers he has appointed—all of them regardless of gender have proven track records as rightwing defenders of the Spanish capitalist state—are indicative of a drastic restructuring of bourgeois politics even further to the right.

The new Economy Minister is Nadia Calviño, a lawyer and economist who worked for more than a decade at the Spanish Economy Ministry before becoming, in 2014, the European Commission’s Director General for Budget.

Her appointment is further proof that the Sánchez government will continue on the austerity path of his predecessor and comply with the European Union’s demands. Calviño will be charged with executing the austerity and militarist budget passed by the PP government last month, which Sánchez swore to implement during his no confidence vote.

Sánchez has said that his government’s aims “will be to comply with European commitments, guarantee budgetary stability, macroeconomic stability and to comply with the agreement of this Parliament, that is, execute the General State Budgets for 2018,” passed by the PP.

As compared to eight years ago, the budget has 13 percent less spending for education, 8 percent less for health, 27 percent less for research and technological development, 35 percent less for culture, 58 percent less for infrastructure investments and zero funding for Civil War “historical memory” projects.

Calviño has already received the praise of one of the most powerful bankers in the country, Ana Patricia Botín, president of Santander Bank, who declared Calviño “a guarantee” to the European Union.

The Ministry of Finance will be led by María Jesús Montero. Formerly, she led the finance administration of Andalusia, one of the poorest regions in Spain, where she

negotiated austerity budgets with the rightwing Citizens party and before that with the Stalinist-led United Left. One of Montero's first tasks will be to negotiate the 2019 budget with other parliamentary groups.

The EU has already warned that the Spanish government will miss the public deficit reduction targets this year, and has demanded Spain cut 0.65 percent of its GDP, equivalent to €7 billion in the next budget.

Another appointment is the conservative pro-PP former judge, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, as Interior Minister. Marlaska's ministry will see its budget increase by 6.5 percent to enable the recruitment of more policemen. He is infamous for his actions in the National Court, the heir to the Francoist exceptional Public Order Court, including refusing to investigate allegations of torture of detainees in his custody and declaring that Spain's Foreigner Internment Centres, notorious for human rights abuses, "don't violate basic rights."

Markaska is also linked to the prosecutions of cartoonists at the satirical magazine *El Jueves* for "insulting the Crown Prince" and Catalan nationalists for their collective burning of photographs of the king. The fact that Marlaska is gay is also being heralded as a sign of the progressiveness of the new government.

Margarita Robles has been nominated to head the Ministry of Defence. In the PP budget approved by Sánchez there will be a 10.5 percent increase in military expenditure—the largest in a single year since the Franco era. Under the pretext of "the struggle against terrorism," the National Intelligence Centre will see its budget increase this year by 7.4 percent.

Veteran PS bureaucrat Josep Borrell will be in charge of foreign affairs. Borrell, who is Catalan, has been an active campaigner against the ongoing secession drive in Catalonia, speaking at demonstrations called by the anti-secessionist Societat Civil Catalana and attended by far-right parties.

Another high-profile appointment is Carmen Calvo, who will simultaneously be Sánchez's deputy PM and the head of the newly restored Equality Ministry. As an expert in constitutional law, last year Calvo helped the PP design the implementation of Article 155, which suspended the regional autonomy of Catalonia, led to the imprisonment or forced exile of the regional government and put it under direct control of Madrid.

Although Sánchez has announced he will enter talks with the new regional Catalan government under premier Quim Torra—a right-winger who supports a Catalan republic—the inclusion of Borrell and Calvo in the new

cabinet is a sign that the new government does not intend to satisfy secessionist demands for a legal referendum on independence in the region.

Sánchez's new Minister of Territorial Policy and Public Affairs, Meritxell Batet, has announced that the PSOE government will study the 45 points that former Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont sent to Rajoy last year, the majority relating to increased investments and resources for the regional bourgeoisie. It was Rajoy's refusal to negotiate the 45 points that drove the Catalan nationalists onto the collision course with Madrid.

As a sign of goodwill towards the Catalan nationalists, the Sánchez government has announced the lifting of Madrid's supervision of Catalonia's finances.

The concessions in Catalonia do not represent a shift to the left. Rather, the PSOE government is preparing to strike a deal with the Catalan nationalists to clear the decks for its attacks on the working class.

Like the Syriza government in Greece and the Left Bloc-supported Socialist Party government in neighbouring Portugal, the "progressive" PSOE government will carry out the dictates of the European Union, banks and corporations and pursue Spanish geostrategic interests.

Political responsibility for this government and its policies lies with the pseudo-left Podemos. It acted as midwife for the new regime, goading Sánchez to call for the no-confidence motion and procuring behind the scenes the support of the nationalists. It portrayed Sánchez and his cronies as a "progressive" alternative to the PP and Citizens. And it will continue to do so. In the words of Podemos leader Iñigo Errejón, "Podemos has to be the force that supports, sustains and pushes this Government."



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