

Podemos: Midwife of Spain's new PSOE government

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The installation of a minority Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is further proof of the reactionary character of the pseudo-left Podemos party.

Podemos is the chief architect and main prop of the new government, which is committed to austerity and militarism. It is a realization of Podemos' objective of constructing a "Government of Change" with the PSOE.

Podemos is politically implicated in what happens in the months ahead as surely as if Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias were Spain's prime minister.

Spanish workers and youth will be shown what type of "change" Podemos had in mind. They will see the result of Sánchez's promise to honour the austerity budget and war policies of the previous Popular Party (PP) government. They will witness how the PSOE is preparing, with Podemos' vital support, a confrontation with an increasingly militant working class.

Podemos played the central role in installing the PSOE in power. After 29 top officials linked to the PP government were found guilty of corruption last month, Podemos intervened aggressively. When Sánchez vacillated, Iglesias stepped in urging him to call a no confidence vote against the PP government. He declared, "we are open to support Pedro Sánchez if he calls a no confidence vote. Democracy cannot continue to support criminals holding the government."

Once Sánchez went ahead, Iglesias said that Podemos would support the PSOE "without any preconditions."

But this was not all. With the PSOE's 84 seats and 71 from Podemos and its allies, the PSOE was still 21 seats short of the 176 majority in the 350-seat chamber needed to bring down the PP government. It was then left to Iglesias to whip up support from the regional nationalists and right-wing Citizens party.

Iglesias bragged of his key role to *La Vanguardia*. Whilst Sánchez "threw himself into the pool without having sufficient support," Iglesias revealed, "we were interested in moving this vote forward and we talked with everyone, with Puigdemont, Pascal, with Ortuzar and with Rivera." (Puigdemont is the Catalan regional premier deposed last year by the PP government, Pascal is leader of the Catalan-nationalist Democratic Party of Catalonia, Ortuzar is president of the Basque National Party and Rivera is leader of the right-wing Spanish nationalist Citizens).

For Iglesias and Podemos, the PP's removal was the best way to ensure stability for Spanish capitalism and reassure the EU. He declared, "Spain needs a stable, strong government, which transmits guarantees to the European Union and that can implement, with a parliamentary majority of at least 156 deputies, a progressive government programme."

Podemos' role in installing a pro-capitalist PSOE government is another fundamental international experience of the working class with the pseudo left.

In 2015 in Greece, Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") won a landslide election victory after campaigning against austerity and took office. It immediately betrayed its mandate, trampled on the landslide

"no" vote in its own referendum on austerity and imposed several austerity packages on behalf of the EU.

Podemos expresses a further degeneration of the pseudo-left. It has acted as midwife to an unstable government, led by a reactionary and discredited social-democratic party with a decades-long record of austerity and participation in US-led wars from Afghanistan to Libya.

Sánchez has made it clear that his government will "comply with European commitments, guarantee budgetary stability, macroeconomic stability and comply with the agreement of this Parliament, that is, execute the General State Budgets for 2018" passed by the PP.

This PP budget was militarist and pro-austerity. 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 and 58 percent less for infrastructure. The budget for the Spanish military, however, was increased by 10.5 percent over last year.

The PSOE has also announced it will not reverse the last three labour reforms passed since 2010 under the previous PSOE and PP governments. The reforms have decimated working class living standards and created millions of precarious, low paid jobs. Nearly three-quarters of Spanish youth under 25 are now forced to survive on temporary contracts, well above the 43.9 percent average across the EU.

The PSOE has also announced it will maintain the PP's law on public security, dubbed the "ley mordaza" or "gag law," that restricts freedom of speech, prohibits mass gatherings and imposes fines for protesting and making comments on social media.

Once elected, Sánchez rebuffed Podemos' pleas for ministerial positions in his new government. Iglesias complained that "it has taken him 24 hours to forget who made him prime minister."

But the annoyance was purely for public consumption and did not last long. The Podemos leadership continued to insist that the PSOE government was a step forward. "We are going to give the government all the oxygen in the world if they are willing to implement a legislative agenda agreed upon with us," said Iglesias. His deputy, Iñigo Errejón, declared, "Podemos has to be the force that supports, sustains and pushes this government."

The 2019 budget is set to be discussed over the coming months. Sánchez has already committed to EU budgetary stability, i.e., austerity, which means at least €7 billion in cuts next year.

For its part, Podemos makes perfunctory protests, but they are no more than pleas that what the EU and the PSOE are proposing be imposed more gradually. Podemos' parliamentary spokesperson, Irene Montero, declared that it is possible "to negotiate with Brussels a ceiling of spending and budget conditions to reduce the deficit at a slower pace" claiming this would free "more money for social spending, education, health, dependence and pensions."

The installation of the PSOE government with the support of Podemos and the regional nationalists was the response of sections of the Spanish

ruling elite to popular anger at the PP government's vicious police crackdown last year in Catalonia. More important are their concerns over rising strike action by the working class in Spain and across Europe.

According to the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations (CEOE), the hours lost due to strikes this year have risen 66 percent compared to the same period last year. Since January, 261 strikes have been called across Spain including in Amazon, Correos (the national postal service), the H&M clothes giant's logistics center and the transport sector.

Last week, 3,000 shipyard and metal industry workers defied the Communist Party-aligned Workers Commissions (CC.OO) and the PSOE-aligned General Union of Labor (UGT) and took unofficial strike action in Cádiz, whose mayor, José María González, is a member of Podemos.

Coming amid rising class struggle in Europe, these strikes are terrifying the affluent middle class forces that make up Podemos and sharpening class antagonisms with the working class.

Iglesias symbolizes these layers. The Podemos leader, who once prided himself on living in Madrid's working class neighborhood of Vallecas and said it was dangerous to "isolate oneself from what happens around you like the politicians who live in villas," recently purchased one for himself—to the tune of €600,000. When the purchase was leaked to a Spanish newspaper, he demanded an internal referendum to decide whether he and his partner, Irene Montero, Podemos' parliamentary spokeswoman, should resign. It was a direct appeal to the middle class, thousands of whom have gotten positions of power, influence and privilege in regional and local governments, including in Madrid and Barcelona, by joining Podemos.

In the end, 68 percent of Podemos' members voted for Iglesias to remain, reflecting that Iglesias' position is widely shared among the party membership. This is the material foundation of Podemos' support for a reactionary PSOE government.

Amongst the membership of Podemos and its supporters are a variety of pseudo-left groupings which caution against the party joining the PSOE government it is supporting, unmasking itself and provoking an eruption of working class opposition.

Revolutionary Left, affiliated with the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), warns that should Podemos enter a PSOE government it "would make them jointly responsible for the austerity policies that they will be inevitably forced to do to maintain Sánchez, and would force Podemos to justify the limited scope of their policy to millions of workers and young people. The dissatisfaction with the PSOE-Podemos government policy and its inevitable loss of prestige would prepare the return for a government of the right."

The same futile warnings came from veteran Pabloite Jaime Pastor, a leader of the Anticapitalistas faction, many of whose leaders populate the top ranks of the Podemos bureaucracy. The Anticapitalistas have apologized for every rightward lurch of Podemos. They promote the illusion that Podemos can be pressured if only there is a "mobilisation" of the "street."

Pastor says that Podemos "should reaffirm itself as the political force that, in parliament and together with the social movements, is willing to reach agreements as far as possible with the PSOE from outside the government, as is the case in Portugal, and form an alternative bloc firmly determined to respond to the attacks of the right and, simultaneously, to force Pedro Sánchez to go beyond moderately regenerationist and social-liberal measures."

Pastor is arguing that Podemos should implement the strategy of the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc, BE), Podemos' Portuguese counterpart, which is currently supporting a minority Portuguese Socialist Party (PS) government. In Portugal, the BE and PS have collaborated politically to continue austerity, receiving praise from the EU and financial circles.

To see what Pastor's proposed policy means in practice, one can read a

recent article by BE's Catarina Principe in the pseudo-left magazine *Jacobin* titled "The Portuguese Myth." Under the BE-backed PS government in Portugal, Principe admits:

"The troika labor laws were left untouched, collective bargaining has almost vanished, and precarity is on the rise. A study by the Observatório das Desigualdades places the real unemployment rate at 17.5 percent — much less than the 28 percent in 2013 but far above the official government numbers (8.5 percent). Almost all the new jobs that have been created are precarious. Public services are crumbling: both health and education are heavily underfunded and on the verge of collapse. The Portuguese banking system is a ticking time bomb, with more banks bailed out with public money but not under public control, leaving it more vulnerable to shifts at the European center than in 2008. The central question of the debt has in fact disappeared from public debate."

This is a succinct description of the program Podemos has in mind for Spain, once it is stripped of the cynical evasions of figures like Iglesias and Pastor. In one or another form, the growing opposition in the working class will provoke a collision between the working class and the reactionary layers of the upper middle class for which Podemos speaks.

Podemos' installation of a PSOE government is a vindication of the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) opposition to Stalinism and Pabloism, the two main forces that created Podemos. It refutes forces like the CWI who insist that workers and youth must support Podemos because the only alternative is the right wing. And it underscores the necessity of building sections of the ICFI in Spain and across Europe, to offer Trotskyist leadership to the rising opposition of the working class to the pseudo left.

What is unfolding is the product of the historic bankruptcy and the anti-Marxist petty-bourgeois orientation of Podemos. Young Stalinist professors like Pablo Iglesias, Iñigo Errejón and Juan Carlos Monedero joined forces with the Pabloite *Anticapitalistas* to create Podemos. They promised it would produce radical change, even though Stalinism and Pabloism were key forces in the creation of the new parliamentary capitalist regime during the 1978 Transition from the regime created by fascist dictator Francisco Franco.

This promise has been exposed as utterly false. Podemos finds itself in an alliance with the PSOE, the Spanish bourgeoisie's main party of government in the post-Franco period, which is now carrying out the policies of the PP—a direct political descendant of Franco. Podemos is not a radical party of change, but a prop of a reactionary and discredited social order.

Four years after the WSWs warned in its first article on Podemos that the new party was a "political fraud" seeking "above all to politically disarm the working class," its critique of Podemos has been completely vindicated.



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