

Spain: Podemos co-founder Íñigo Errejón splits from party

Paul Mitchell
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The fifth anniversary this month of the founding of the Spanish pseudo-left party Podemos [“We can”] was marked by the most serious split in the organisation’s short existence.

Five years to the day since the party’s establishment, January 17, Podemos co-founder and number two in the party leadership Íñigo Errejón called a press conference to announce he had allied with “independent” Madrid city mayor Manuela Carmena ahead of May’s local and regional elections.

Last November, Carmena created More Madrid (Más Madrid) to replace the Now Madrid (Ahora Madrid) “citizen platform” that Podemos helped create to run for re-election as mayor. Carmena defined More Madrid as “innovative, independent, democratic and progressive” and formed “by individuals, not parties.”

At his press conference, Errejón declared that Podemos had “failed as a political instrument” because it had not generated “hopes and confidence.” The recent formation of a Popular Party (PP)–Citizens coalition in Andalusia backed by the fascist Vox party, overturning 36 years of Socialist Party (PSOE) rule, had been “a wake-up call,” he said.

Polls suggest that the PP, Citizens and Vox could win 31 seats in the Madrid city election—two more than needed to form a majority administration.

The rise of Vox is a devastating indictment of Errejón and the “left populism” promoted by his mentor, Belgian academic Chantal Mouffe, with whom he co-wrote *Podemos: In the Name of the People* (2016). Shortly after the book’s publication, Errejón claimed that thanks to Podemos’ “popular and patriotic discourse” and because it occupied the same political “space,” the party would prevent the rise of a far-right movement in Spain.

The pro-capitalist, anti-Marxist basis of “left populism” is revealed by Errejón’s demands that all talk of “nostalgia” for or “defence” of “the left,” i.e., of socialism, has to be abandoned and a “broad democratic front” built.

He lamented, “We cannot be the only left in the world that has no homeland, I am very proud of my country, and the

country I am proud of, Spain, is a country that is a leader in freedom, in tolerance, in human rights, in democracy ... So democracy must be taken care of.”

The statement, “The Strategy of International Class Struggle and the Political Fight Against Capitalist Reaction in 2019,” posted January 3 on the WSWS, discussed contemporary “left populism.” It explained that this brand of politics is a debased version of the 1930s anti-socialist Popular Front politics of class collaboration, justified with “democratic” phraseology, but without the “historical, let alone political, connection to the working class” that enabled the Stalinist parties to subordinate the working class to the capitalist class and enabled Hitler’s victory in Germany and Franco’s in Spain.

The January 3 statement continued, “In opposition to Marxism and socialism, the politics of Mouffe [and Errejón] and the pseudo-left advocates the formation of an amorphous, programmatically undefined, supra-class and nationalist movement. As Mouffe explicitly states, the left-populist movement neither identifies itself as socialist nor calls for a struggle against the capitalist state. It envisions the possibility of finding points of agreement and collaboration with the extreme right, as Syriza has done in Greece and Podemos in Spain. Opposing the fight to win the working class to a socialist program, left populism advocates the utilization of myths and other forms of irrationalist politics:

“Left populism is one expression of the politics of the pseudo-left, which has its theoretical origins in the demoralized denial of the revolutionary role of the working class by the theoreticians of the Frankfurt School and the postmodernist denial of objective truth and the Marxist and Trotskyist ‘grand narrative’ of the revolutionary class struggle. Pseudo-left politics, based on the elevation of race, gender, sexual identity and the ‘people,’ is the politics of a privileged layer of the middle class, the top 10 percent of the population, which is covered over with left phraseology and slogans like the ‘Party of the 99 Percent.’”

Following Errejón’s announcement, Podemos leader Pablo

Iglesias confirmed that the party had split. However, he made no political assessment of his former deputy's departure because there is little of substance to differentiate them.

Claims that their conflicts reflect differences of principle or of class orientation are politically fraudulent. Both are travelling on the same "left populist" dirt-track, with Errejón being the pre-eminent opportunist weathervane and pointing the way.

Iglesias was left to complain, "I could not imagine that today, when we should be celebrating the fifth birthday of Podemos, things would be like this... I can't believe that Manuela [Carmena] and Iñigo were concealing the fact that they were working on an electoral project of their own for the Madrid region, and that they made a surprise announcement. Our members deserve more respect than that."

Iglesias nevertheless wished Errejón "good luck building his new party," before confirming that Podemos will run candidates against him in May.

The disintegration of Podemos has been viewed with concern by the ruling elite, which recognises its vital role in stabilizing the Spanish state amid growing economic crisis and social opposition. An editorial of the pro-PSOE *El País* warned, "An irrelevant Podemos today would be bad news, not only for the PSOE, which has treated it as a potential partner and which sees a space to the left that it cannot absorb, but also because the movement was really able to detect a political need. Democratic systems need to formulate alternatives with utopian components, aspirational elements that do not reduce politics to mere management and that strive to open other ways to involve the citizenry."

However, the claim by Podemos to represent a new "progressive" politics against "the caste" is already in tatters. Gone are the days when Podemos polled around 30 percent of the vote making it the country's number one party. Polls, before this latest crisis, suggest that support for Podemos and the United Left (IU) combined has slumped to 16 percent and the Unidos-Podemos alliance has been relegated to fourth place.

In power, Podemos has acted as an appendage of the PSOE and defender of the Spanish state. Podemos was key to the installation of a minority PSOE government in 2018 that has continued, in all essentials, the policies of austerity, militarism and repression in Catalonia of the previous PP government.

Workers and youth have witnessed, first-hand, its record in office in numerous town halls and city halls. Promises that Podemos-led "municipalities of change" (Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Cádiz, etc.) would reverse austerity and use "citizen debt audits" to stop the payment of

"illegitimate" debts came to nothing ... nowhere more so than in Madrid.

In June 2015, Carmena's Podemos-led coalition Now Madrid gained power in the capital, ending 24 years of right-wing PP rule. The newly appointed head of finance at Madrid City Council, Carlos Sanchez Mato, a leader of the United Secretariat's Anticapitalistas faction in Podemos, trumpeted, "The way to fulfil our obligations is to cast aside the spending rule, battling until the last stand."

Within months of this boasting, Carmena acceded to demands from the PP government not only to reverse the limited increase in social spending and investment implemented, but to drastically cut the budget.

Iglesias leapt to Carmena's defence, saying she had no choice but to comply and insisted that she would be reselected as Now Madrid's 2019 mayoral candidate.

The whole filthy episode was covered up by the Pabloite Anticapitalistas, who have continually peddled the illusion that Podemos could be "reinvigorated" by "social mobilisation" to return to the party's founding document (largely written by the Anticapitalistas) promising debt cancellation, nationalisation and membership control.

Following Errejón's departure, Anticapitalistas leader and *Viento Sur* editor Brais Fernández complained that the leadership of Podemos "has failed miserably when it comes to setting up a project in Madrid, lacks a broad, dynamic and articulated militant base, and has behaved with a terrible arrogance towards the other sectors combined with political opportunism." He then turned to the IU Stalinist electoral front with an appeal to help the Anticapitalistas "promote candidacies that are the embryo of a new space" in Madrid, before offering the usual olive branch to Podemos saying they could join "but not impose their rules."

"Let's make it possible for assemblies, militancies and transforming programs to return. It is the best guarantee to avoid decomposition in these dark times," Fernández pleaded.



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