

After Spanish elections, Podemos pushes for pro-austerity PSOE government

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3 May 2019

Since Sunday's elections saw the fascistic Vox party enter parliament and a small plurality of votes go to the ruling, pro-austerity Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), Podemos has embraced the PSOE. It is working to block the independent mobilization of the working class against the PSOE and growing far-right danger in Europe.

Minutes after election results were announced, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias held a press conference calling on the PSOE to form a "left" government with Podemos. On Wednesday, he published an editorial in *El Pais*, Spain's main social-democratic daily, titled "A stable left government," warning PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez against trying to form a minority PSOE government without allying with Podemos.

Iglesias wrote that the PSOE by itself "does not have enough seats to make this government a success nor to defend it in the left, particularly given that in practice it would be a government obtaining support for many of its measures from the right. Faced with that, our commitment to our voters and to the socially progressive majority only gives us one option. It is to guarantee stability and policies defending social justice and dialog, from within the government."

He pledged more "fiscal justice, feminist economic policies, guaranteed pensions, public services, energy transition, limits on precariousness, housing, rights and freedoms, and dialogue in Catalonia."

His claims that Podemos would push the PSOE to the left if it joined the government are a political fraud. Over the last year, the PSOE has ruled Spain as a minority government relying on the support in parliament of Podemos and the Catalan nationalist parties to obtain a majority of the vote. On this basis, it pursued right-wing policies—adopting austerity budgets

for 2018 and 2019, funnelling billions of euros to the army, and backing the prosecution of Catalan nationalist politicians after the brutal Spanish police crackdown in 2017 on voters in the Catalan independence referendum.

As Iglesias asks the PSOE to give Podemos a few ministries in its government, the PSOE is preparing more ruthless austerity and overseas imperialist interventions. In a letter to the European Union (EU), the PSOE has promised to lower its public deficit from 2.48 percent to 2 percent at the end of this year, 1.1 percent in 2020 and 0.4 percent in 2021. This means tens of billions of euros in cuts targeting the working class.

The PSOE is also one of the main European governments pushing for regime change in oil-rich Venezuela. It gave Leopoldo López, leader of the far-right Voluntad Popular (Popular Will) party, refuge in Spain's embassy in Caracas, after he and the US proxy Juan Guaidó launched a failed coup Tuesday. A scion of one of Venezuela's wealthiest families, López has been under house arrest since 2017 after being convicted of trying to overthrow the Maduro government.

Knowing that these reactionary policies will generate deep opposition among workers, Iglesias hopes to defend the PSOE "in the left," that is, to block opposition to the PSOE on its left.

In fact, Podemos was built by Stalinist professors and the *Anticapitalistas* affiliated to France's Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party in 2014, after the 2011 *indignados* protests against PSOE Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. It promised "radical change" against the PSOE, which has imposed austerity and waged imperialist wars in Iraq or Afghanistan every time it has been in power since first taking office in

1982. But Podemos in fact continued the Stalinists' and Pabloites' alliance with the PSOE. The fraud of its claims to represent "radical change" now stand exposed.

By supporting the Spanish right's crackdown on the Catalan nationalists—and allowing Vox to prosecute its show trial of the Catalan nationalists—the PSOE accommodates itself to the rise of Vox, which the Popular Party (PP) and Citizens increasingly echo. The response of Podemos to the growth of far-right parties is to embrace all the harder the policies that led to their growth.

Across Europe, capitalist governments are turning to authoritarian forms of rule and encouraging a revival of fascism. In nine European countries including Italy, the far-right is in power. In Germany, the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) is the leading parliamentary opposition party, and Angela Merkel's coalition government is adopting many of its policies. In France, President Emmanuel Macron hailed France's fascist dictator, Marshal Philippe Pétain, as he repressed "yellow vest" protests.

Three years ago, Vox had only 0.2 percent of the vote. Now, it has 10.3 percent and 24 deputies in Congress; an explicitly pro-fascist party sits in the Spanish Congress for the first time since 1978 and the end of the fascist regime created by Generalissimo Francisco Franco in the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. The retired generals or PP officials who lead Vox spew fascist propaganda, demanding tax cuts for the rich, mass privatizations, labour reforms, the defence of the memory of Franco's bloody fascist armies, and the outlawing of separatism and Marxism.

The mobilization of Spanish police to brutally assault peaceful voters in Catalonia two years ago, and talk of mobilizing army units against Barcelona, underscore that the far-right threat is not hypothetical. Fascistic repression is under discussion at top levels of the state.

History shows the only way to combat the European bourgeoisie's drive to fascist forms of rule is the mobilization of the working class in political struggle against capitalism. However, this requires building a new, Trotskyist political leadership in the working class against the petty-bourgeois anti-Marxism of Podemos. Podemos itself seeks to suppress the workers and hand political initiative back to Vox.

This underlies the hostility of the affluent professors,

union bureaucrats and media operatives in Podemos to an intransigent struggle against the far right. Faced with mounting social anger and rising threats of fascistic repression, they insist all the more violently that the left and the working class are politically dead, and that Vox's rise is not too serious.

Former Podemos leader Íñigo Errejón attributed Podemos' poor showing—it lost 29 seats—to its insufficient embrace of postmodernist identity politics and its decision to continue calling itself a left-wing party. A long-time advocate of alliances with the right-wing Citizens party, Errejón called for Podemos to abandon the left-right distinction to concentrate on postmodernist identity politics.

Errejón told *El Diario*, "Podemos should never have abandoned transversality and contented itself with just being a little corner of the left." The class content of Errejón's searching for demands on gender or racial identity that cut "transversally" across the left-right divide emerged clearly as he discussed Vox.

Dismissing left-wing criticisms of Vox leader Santiago Abascal, Errejón said: "From now on, when Abascal says that they are the Spain that resists, we must say that they are a part of Spain that is legitimate, but is very small." Errejón also mocked "a certain cultural left which likes to gloat about the catastrophe to come with Vox. I don't mean we shouldn't take them seriously and fight them, but one does not fight them hysterically."

Errejón's denunciation of the left is repugnant. Vox's positions, like its hailing of Franco's army—which carried out an illegal coup, a three-year civil war, and the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of left-wing workers and youth—are not legitimate. They are historical lies designed to justify the European bourgeoisie's reactionary repression and austerity today.

Podemos' alignment with a repressive PSOE government that has strengthened the far right underscores its political bankruptcy and its hostility to the working class.



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