

Spain: No “red lines” in talks for a Socialist Party-Podemos coalition government

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Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias is in talks with acting Spanish prime minister and Socialist Party (PSOE) leader Pedro Sánchez to discuss the possibility of a coalition government in the wake of the PSOE winning the April 28 general election.

Before the meeting, the Citizens Council of Podemos had agreed that Iglesias should not impose any “red lines or ultimatums” in his talks with Sánchez.

Over the last few days, Iglesias has redoubled efforts to convince Spain’s ruling elite that Podemos can bolster its austerity and militarist agenda while blocking the independent mobilisation of the working class. He is desperately trying to convince Sánchez that Podemos is the best option as a coalition partner rather than the right-wing Citizens party, or any attempt by the PSOE to rule as a minority government.

Although the PSOE won the most seats, its 123 deputies in the 350-member parliament leaves Sánchez well short of the 176 needed for an overall majority. But even with the 42 seats of the Podemos-United Left alliance—Unidas-Podemos—a PSOE/Unidas-Podemos government would still need the support of smaller regional nationalist parties in Catalonia or the Basque Country.

Iglesias was the third leader to meet Sánchez this week at his official residence in Madrid’s Moncloa Palace. On Monday, Sánchez met with Pablo Casado, leader of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), and on Tuesday with Citizens leader Albert Rivera.

After over two hours, Iglesias emerged to hold a short five-minute press conference. He declared that the meeting had “gone very well”: “We have agreed that we are going to work to reach an agreement. ... The progressive forces have to join forces to face the future of Spain.”

Iglesias stressed that during the parliamentary collaboration which kept the PSOE’s 10-month minority government afloat, both parties were able “to build a

relationship of trust” and dealt with each other “with frankness and empathy.”

Such frankness only extends as far as the corridors of power. Iglesias made clear that the negotiations would be discussed behind the scenes between parliamentary spokespersons Adriana Lastra for the PSOE and Irene Montero for Podemos.

As the WSWWS has repeatedly warned, Podemos’ claims that its participation in a PSOE-led government will push the government to the left are a lie. The PSOE has been the preferred instrument of bourgeois rule since the end of the fascist dictatorship in 1978, overseeing Spain’s membership of NATO, the European Union and implementing the first de-industrialisation policies, mass privatisations, and attacks on labour and pensions rights.

After the 2008 global economic crisis, it was a PSOE government that undertook the first savage austerity measures, including cuts to wages and social services and labour reforms. It amended article 135 of the constitution to prioritise repayment of debt over social expenditure, enshrining austerity in law.

In the past 10 months, the PSOE has ruled Spain as a minority government relying on the support of Podemos, the United Left and the Catalan nationalist parties. It steered through austerity budgets for 2018 and 2019, funnelling billions of euros to the army, and backing the prosecution of Catalan nationalist politicians after the brutal police crackdown in 2017 on voters in the independence referendum.

Having taken the measure of Podemos, Sánchez has already indicated that the PSOE will continue with austerity. Last week, it sent its “National Programme of Reforms” policy document to Brussels trumpeting “the lack of inflationary and wage tensions” and “the moderation of public spending” (courtesy of the demobilisation of the working class by Podemos and the United Left) for enabling “the additional reduction of the

deficit or public debt.”

“The fiscal consolidation effort,” the document continues, will be maintained until 2022 through “a set of fiscal measures” to slash the public debt to GDP ratio from the current 97 percent to 88.7 percent in 2022, which can only mean tens of billions of euros in cuts targeting the working class.

The PSOE is adamant it will not reverse any of the previous labour reforms that have devastated the working class and will press ahead with a new labour code to facilitate “the necessary business competitiveness.” It wants to implement the union-big business “Austrian backpack” agreement in which workers are forced to pay into a “personal savings fund” for dismissal rather than receive severance pay from an employer.

“This reform program has been prepared taking into account in particular the Specific Recommendations of the European Council to Spain formulated in July 2018,” the Programme of Reforms concludes.

Iglesias has been subjected to pro-forma criticism from the faction in Podemos comprising the Anticapitalistas of the United Secretariat, which split from the Fourth International under the political leadership of Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel in 1953. Rejecting Trotsky’s analysis of the Soviet bureaucracy as a counterrevolutionary force, they abandoned the struggle to build independent revolutionary parties in favour of acting as a left pressure group on existing mass reformist and Stalinist parties. Acting as a conduit for the upper middle class, United Secretariat leaders have acquired comfortable, prestigious positions in the state apparatus, labour bureaucracies and academia.

At every lurch of Podemos to the right, Anticapitalistas peddle the illusion that it can be “reinvigorated” by “social mobilisation” and returned to the party’s founding document (largely written by the Anticapitalistas) promising debt cancellation, nationalisation and membership control.

In the latest issue of the Pabloite magazine *Viento Sur*, editor and Anticapitalistas leader Jaime Pastor warns that a coalition with the PSOE would make Podemos “a faithful servant of the dictates of [Spain’s main stock exchange] Ibex 35 and the neoliberal troika.”

Fearing further exposure of Podemos, which saw it lose over a third of its Congress seats in the election, Pastor pleads for Podemos to remain “limited to supporting the investiture of Sanchez in parliament and reaffirming the strategic autonomy of a project openly prepared to confront the right wing.”

Once again, Pastor adds that “from the first day” Podemos should “push the PSOE through social mobilizations and popular empowerment around urgent social, feminist, environmental, anti-racist demands, and the defence of rights.”

Pastor’s pathetic schema for Anticapitalistas to pressure Podemos to pressure the PSOE was also voiced by Teresa Rodríguez, leader of Podemos Andalusia, during the Citizens Council on the eve of the Iglesias-Sánchez meeting. Rodríguez said that Podemos should not form part of the government and should instead try to achieve a “Portuguese-style agreement.”

The Portuguese model involves Podemos’ ally, the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, BE), along with the Communist Party (PCP) supporting a minority Socialist Party government of António Costa without entering a formal coalition. The role of the BE and PCP has been to cover for the PS government as it has pursued a supposed “austerity-lite” programme, doling out billions to failing private banks, encouraging property speculation in city centres leading to social cleansing and continuing historically low levels of public investment.

Costa has reneged on election promises to reverse wage cuts, kept the previous government’s labour reforms, used emergency laws to limit industrial action and is preparing further legislation to restrict the right to strike.

This is the anti-democratic, authoritarian response of the Portuguese ruling elite to the biggest wave of protests and strikes since the 1974 Revolution.

Podemos will play a similar role to that of the BE whether it is in coalition with the PS or supports it from outside. On the eve of the local and regional elections on May 26, one of the main demands of Podemos-backed mayor of Barcelona Ada Colau is for “urgent actions to guarantee” safety “in accordance with the needs of the capital of Catalonia” through a massive build-up of the police.



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