

Podemos collapses in European, regional and municipal elections in Spain

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The pseudo-left Podemos party has received its worst electoral results at the local, regional and European level since it was founded over five years ago, as hundreds of thousands who previously deposited their ballot for Podemos decided to either abstain or vote for the Socialist Party (PSOE). It comes barely a month after the party lost 1.5 million votes in the last general election.

On Sunday, besides the elections to the European parliament, Spaniards were called to elect more than 8,000 mayors and regional governments in 12 of Spain's 17 regions. The main victor was the PSOE, which was able to win the same votes at the European, municipal and regional polls. The right-wing Popular Party and Citizens did not improve their results as compared with the general elections last month, but with the support of the far-right Vox could join forces to rule in Madrid and the Madrid region. The PSOE will rule in the regions of Castilla-La Mancha, Extremadura, and the Balearic Islands.

Podemos collapsed in all the polls. At the regional level, the party lost 860,000 votes and 68 regional lawmakers in the 12 regional parliaments. Podemos has lost votes, lawmakers and power in all regions.

In Castilla-La Mancha, where Podemos was the key government partner of the PSOE, Podemos has disappeared. It has gone from two seats to zero, with a mere 33,000 votes. Podemos regional leader José García Molina resigned.

In the European elections, Podemos and the United Left won 600,000 votes less than in 2014 when they went in separate slates. In that year, they secured 11 seats; this time, they have been reduced to 6.

Together with its ongoing programmatic lurch to the right, including its defence of forming a pro-austerity and militarist PSOE-led government, a major factor in

the decline of Podemos has been the experience of workers and middle-class people with the party in numerous town and city halls.

For four years, Podemos has ruled a combined population of nearly 7 million in major cities throughout Spain, including Madrid, Barcelona, Zaragoza, Valencia, Cádiz, Santiago, Ferrol and A Coruña. After Sunday, of these eight, only Cádiz and Valencia remain under the control of Podemos-backed forces. Manuela Carmena lost in Madrid to the right and far-right, and Ada Colau in Barcelona is tied with the Catalan-separatist candidate of the Republican Left of Catalonia.

Four years ago, they were dubbed “the municipalities of change” or “rebel councils.” There was talk of “citizen debt audits” to stop the payment of “illegitimate” debts, end building projects undertaken during Spain's construction boom, end rent increases and make it harder to obtain licences to turn apartments into short-stay holiday accommodations. They also claimed they would improve ordinary workers' lives, raise social spending and turn their cities into safe havens for migrants.

Instead, they have become tools of the ruling class to impose austerity. In Madrid, Carmena reduced the public debt by 52 percent, including by slashing health care and unemployment benefits. At the same time, Carmena gave a green light to the construction of luxury complexes and frozen real estate projects long-sought by large banks and big property companies. In Barcelona, Colau was preparing a budget before the elections that would have cut up to €109 million from schools, libraries, theatres and health care centres.

Colau and Carmena also promised to put an end to the savage annual rent increases. Instead, in the past four years, rents have increased by 36.7 percent in

Madrid and 34.2 percent in Barcelona. Hundreds of working families continue to be evicted every day.

Both mayors are infamous for their brutal treatment of migrant street vendors, deploying large numbers of local police to target street vendors for dispersal, arrest, and even threatened deportations. The street vendors, mainly migrants and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, are regularly attacked by police who set up “ambushes” at certain metro stations and confiscate street vendors’ merchandise.

In past years, street vendors have clashed with the pseudo-left mayors, including in Madrid in March, when riots broke out after a Senegalese vendor died of a heart attack after a police check.

In Barcelona, Colau also openly attacked striking workers. In 2016, she opposed a strike of 3,200 workers on Barcelona’s public metro system (TMB). When it went ahead, Colau supported a legally mandated “minimum service” requirement to keep trains running, helping to ensure the strike’s defeat.

To the eyes of many workers, the “municipalities of change” have become a symbol of what the pseudo-left would do in power, as demonstrated by the Syriza government in Greece and Podemos’s support for a pro-austerity and militarist PSOE government. What is emerging ever more clearly is that the mounting opposition in the working class, expressed in growing strikes and protests opposing austerity, militarism and attacks on democratic rights, cannot find expression without a struggle against the pseudo-left parties.

As the working class is moving to the left, the pseudo-left is scrambling is working to block the opposition in the working class to the PSOE and growing far-right danger in Europe.

On Sunday night, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias spoke at the party’s headquarters without mincing a word on the results. Throughout the past weeks, he has been explicit that his aim on Sunday was to obtain the best results possible to leverage them to pressure the PSOE into forming a coalition government at national level. Last Friday, Iglesias even told EFE it was “common sense” that he will be minister if there is a coalition government with the PSOE.

Yesterday, Iglesias recognised that the results were not good, blaming the “division” of the left for the bad results. He congratulated the PSOE and called for a “progressive ruling bloc” from towns, to regions and

the national government. This signifies that Podemos could also potentially find itself in alliance with openly right-wing forces.

Assessing the results, acting PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez appealed to Citizens to be willing to rule with him: “The PSOE is the first political force in the country. Spaniards share the recipes that we are preparing for the Government of Spain. Where the PSOE cannot govern it will be because the right makes agreements with the far-right. This is entirely the responsibility of PP and Citizens. It will not be understood in Europe by liberal and conservative parties. I appeal to your responsibility. It is time for the cordon sanitaire on the PSOE to be lifted. We must isolate the extreme right.”



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