# Podemos calls internal vote to enter PSOE-led Spanish government

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In its latest horse-trading manoeuvres with the Socialist Party (PSOE) to form a government in Spain, Podemos—the party that proclaimed itself an "electoral war machine" fighting for the people against a corrupt "caste" of pro-austerity politicians—is now calling its members to support a militarist, pro-austerity PSOE government either from within or outside.

Since an inconclusive Spanish general election in April, PSOE and Podemos have been negotiating the configuration of a government in backdoor talks. Terrified of growing social anger in the working class internationally, Podemos is deepening its alignment with the PSOE, the Spanish bourgeoisie's principal party of government over the last 40 years.

Soon after the general elections, both parties agreed that the PSOE would lead a coalition government with Podemos. Podemos delayed any talks until the European, regional and local elections in May, expecting that the results would strengthen its negotiating power with the PSOE. The pseudo-left party, however, received its worst electoral results since its foundation five years ago. Hundreds of thousands who previously voted for Podemos abstained or voted for the PSOE.

PSOE leader and acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has rejected a coalition government in favour of parliamentary deal between his party and Podemos to support a PSOE minority government. Iglesias rejected this idea and talks broke down until an ambiguous "government of cooperation" was agreed.

Then, within weeks before parliament holds a vote to officially appoint the new prime minister, the PSOE refused to consider a coalition government with Podemos, with Sánchez only considering the possibility of placing independent candidates "of renown" in a few ministerial posts. As an alternative, Podemos members could be offered mid-level state posts. Iglesias rejected this, and Sánchez threatened to call new elections if he did not obtain enough parliamentary support, raising the prospect of a new election in November, which would be the fourth one in four years.

Sánchez also appealed to right-wing Citizens party and Popular Party to abstain in a vote to allow him to be invested, recalling that the PSOE helped invest a PP-led minority government through its abstention. Both parties refused.

Now, Iglesias has called an internal vote to put pressure on the PSOE. Podemos' 190,000 members will be asked: "How should Podemos lawmakers vote in the 13th investiture session?" Option 1 is "To make Pedro Sánchez prime minister, it is necessary to reach a comprehensive coalition government agreement … without vetoes, where the coalition government would have a representation reasonably proportional to their votes." Option 2 is "To make Pedro Sánchez prime minister (either by vote in favour or abstention) … a government designed solely by the PSOE."

These two options reflect the calculations underlying the Podemos leadership's talks with the PSOE. Articulating the interests of an upper-middle-class constituency, they have no problem with backing a reactionary PSOE government, and are primarily worried about securing positions in the state machine.

Podemos is also acutely aware that its loss of support is not a conjunctural phenomenon, but one rooted in growing social anger with the entire political establishment and the trade unions. Terrified at the upsurge of protests and strikes, in Spain and internationally, and of explosive international conflicts like the US-EU war drive against Iran, Podemos is now in a hurry to get as many state posts as possible.

The acting government has already indicated that a

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new PSOE government will be committed to strengthening the army and police-state machine and implement further attacks on the working class.

The PSOE intends to abolish the annual automatic pension increase based on the consumer price index. The previous PP government unveiled this plan but retracted it amid pensioners' protests. In the next four years, the PSOE also intends to raise taxes disproportionately affecting the workers. In labour relations, it wants to implement the so-called "Austrian backpack" endorsed by the big business association, the Spanish Confederation of Employers' Organizations. Inspired by a 2002 measure imposed in Austria, it forces workers to pay into a "personal savings fund" to buffer the impact of dismissal instead of receiving severance pay from employers.

Spain is also under pressure by the EU's Economic and Financial Affairs Council to impose an estimated €7.8 billion budget reduction in 2020—either through tax increases, social cuts or both.

In military affairs, the government has taken the unprecedented action of increasing the army by 7,000 soldiers. Since the end of the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, the army has been gradually reduced year after year to the current 120,000 active soldiers. This process has been reversed for the first time by the Sánchez government. The PSOE has also accelerated a €4 billion plan to acquire 348 "Piranha 5" 8x8 wheeled armoured vehicles, specifically designed for operations in Africa and the Middle East.

Continuing the turn towards authoritarian rule, the PSOE has shelved prior promises to eliminate the PP's law on public security, dubbed the "gag law," which restricts freedom of speech, prohibits mass gatherings and imposes fines for protesting and making comments on social media.

Sánchez also intensified the crackdown on the Catalan nationalists over their 2017 independence referendum, including presiding over the show trial of Catalan nationalist leaders who face up to 25 years in prison and charging senior Catalan government officials and public television and radio of belonging to a "criminal organisation."

To all this, Iglesias has remained completely silent. In the latest negotiations, he promised "full loyalty" if Podemos was part of a PSOE-led government. Iglesias even admitted that "we have not done more than give in [to the PSOE's demands]. We have been flexible from the beginning."

Podemos's Pabloite *Anticapitalistas* faction has reacted by making predictable, tactical criticisms of Iglesias. The leader of Podemos Andalucia, Teresa Rodríguez, rejected the Iglesias' vote, tweeting that what should be asked is: "A government agreement with the PSOE, yes, no or abstention, and provide more details of the agreement which is being submitted to the vote." She added that the internal vote is "unfortunately an insult to our intelligence."

This criticism is bankrupt and unprincipled. The Pabloite and Stalinist elements of Podemos came together in 2014 to found the party, rooted in a postmodernist rejection of Marxism and the revolutionary role of the working class. Their aim was to shore up the post-Francoite order.

A year later, in January 2015, the Pabloites announced they were dissolving their party into Podemos because it was the only "electoral instrument for the working social majority, which aims to be the tool that allows building a government at the service of the people below." Since then, they have trailed behind each right-wing lurch of Iglesias, always warning that it was the last straw and threatening a split. In the meantime, they filled in Podemos' positions at local, regional, national and European level.

Their latest criticism should be taken with contempt as all the previous ones. Their main concern is to protect a potential PSOE-Podemos government from criticism on its left—namely, criticism that Podemos supports a government pursuing militarist police-state measures against the workers.

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