

Election set for November 10 as attempts to form Spanish government collapse

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Five months after the inconclusive April 28 general elections, Spain will hold new elections on November 10. Spanish King Felipe VI declared that Acting Prime Minister and Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) leader Pedro Sanchez had failed to secure enough support to be confirmed as premier.

On Tuesday, Sánchez announced: “It has been impossible to complete the mandate given to us by the Spanish people on April 28.” Attacking the opposition parties, he added: “They have made it impossible for us. There is no majority in Congress that guarantees the formation of a government, which pushes us to a repeat election on November 10.”

Yesterday, in parliament, Sánchez accused the leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, of “dogmatism,” Popular Party (PP) leader Pablo Casado of “lacking sense of state” and Citizens leader Albert Rivera of “irresponsibility.” Sánchez said that “they have not accepted” the result of the elections of April. He added that Spain needs “stability” and “moderation.”

Two years after the violent police crackdown on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, Sánchez also warned the separatist Republican Left of Catalonia that he could again invoke Article 155 to remove the democratically-elected regional Catalan government “if you attempt to violate the Constitution.”

These elections would be the fourth in four years. In 2015, the grip of the two main parties that have ruled Spain since the end of the fascist Franco dictatorship in 1978, the PSOE and the right-wing PP, collapsed. Both of these parties have imposed brutal austerity measures since the 2008 Wall Street crash and global economic crisis. Since then, every successive election has produced a hung parliament.

The main opposition parties reacted not by welcoming Sánchez’s failure to hold onto power, but

by denouncing the PSOE for failing to assemble a parliamentary majority that could form a functioning government. Casado (PP) accused Sánchez of wanting new elections “since the start,” referring to expectations of an uptick in votes for the PSOE in upcoming elections. Rivera, for his part, called on Casado and the PP to try to form an alternative government after the November elections.

Podemos asked Sánchez to “Clarify why you don’t want to rule with us.” Podemos deputy spokeswoman Ione Belarra added that the PSOE was “on the way to an electoral replay” because “their gurus tell them that they will win a few more seats.” She also speculated that the PSOE wants to “soften” the leader of Citizens, Albert Rivera, possibly to form a governmental alliance with his party.

These events mark a new milestone in the disintegration of the traditional political set-up in Europe. It takes place as the ruling class in the UK faces its most severe crisis since World War II over Brexit and is preparing for social unrest following a potential no-deal Brexit.

Driving all the major parties is their fear of the working class, with mass strikes in Portugal, the “yellow vest” protests in France and a global upsurge of the class struggle.

There is broad concern in ruling circles over a possible social explosion in Spain. After the Catalan crackdown, the PSOE staged a show trial of Catalan nationalist political prisoners, who expect harsh sentences of up to 25 years in jail to be handed down in coming weeks. Mass protests are expected against the sentences. These would coincide with an upsurge of class struggle in Spain. Strikes have erupted in recent months in the state-owned Renfe corporation, which runs freight and passenger trains, among pilots from

Ryanair and ground staff of Iberia airlines.

Despite the ruling elite's desperate attempts to form a stable government under these explosive conditions, it has until now proven unable to do so due to the rapid collapse of voters' loyalties to the traditional ruling parties.

In the April elections, the PSOE obtained 123 seats, far from the necessary 176 necessary for a majority in the 350-seat Congress. But the PP only obtained 66 seats, Citizens 57 and the fascist VOX 24—leaving the right and far right with only 147 combined. With these results, the PSOE needed the support from Podemos' 42 lawmakers, and the support or abstention of nationalist and secessionist parties such as the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the Basque-nationalist PNV, and the Valencian-nationalist Compromís, to form a parliamentary majority.

But for the last five months all attempts at majority-building have failed. Sánchez tried to push for a single-party government in negotiations with both Podemos and the right-wing parties, trying to convince Citizens and PP to abstain in a confidence vote so that the PSOE could win a parliamentary vote despite not having a majority in the legislature. In July, Podemos and the PSOE attempted a coalition government, but negotiations again broke down.

Podemos, articulating the interests of its reactionary upper-middle-class social base, made repeated concessions to try to form a government led by the PSOE, the Spanish bourgeoisie's traditional social-democratic party of austerity and imperialist war. It even pledged "full loyalty" to the PSOE in all state questions, including the repression of the Catalan nationalists.

Within Podemos, factional differences have erupted since April over how to proceed. The dominant faction led by Iglesias is aware that Podemos is rapidly losing support, having lost half of its voters since 2015. This is not a conjunctural phenomenon, but one rooted in growing social anger with the entire political establishment and the trade unions. Terrified at the international upsurge of protests and the increasingly explosive international situation, this faction wants to enter a PSOE government to provide it as much stability in its wars and attacks on the working class as possible.

Iglesias appealed to the king to persuade the PSOE to

form a coalition with Podemos on its terms, saying: "I think the king should make all the candidates understand, and in particular the one with the most support [i.e., the PSOE], that the coalition is a way to give stability to our parliamentary system."

Another faction in the periphery of Podemos, led by Stalinists and Pabloites, pushed for a "Portuguese-style" government: Podemos would support the social democrats in parliament without entering into the government. Podemos is aware that a PSOE government would increase military spending, impose billions in austerity and savagely repress the Catalan nationalists. Under these conditions, its manoeuvres are little more than a cynical ploy to avoid taking responsibility for the right-wing policies of the government they are supporting.

The PSOE, meanwhile, has been divided over whether to pursue a minority government with Podemos which would make it vulnerable to the pressure of the Catalan nationalists, under conditions where the PSOE has overseen the show trial against the Catalan nationalists.

In a last-minute bid, Citizens offered to abstain in any investiture debate if the PSOE promised not to increase taxes, ruled out pardoning the Catalan leaders on trial, and rejected the support of secessionists in the Navarra region. Sánchez said his party was already fulfilling the conditions and called on Citizens to end the impasse and avoid another election being called. This failed, however, sending Spain to its fourth election since December 2015.



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