

Spain's November 10 elections and the fight against authoritarian rule

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On Sunday, Spain is holding its fourth general elections in as many years, six months after the last elections this April. The elections sharply expresses essential political issues facing workers across Europe and internationally.

For the snap general elections last April, the European sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) issued a statement, "The Spanish elections and the struggle against authoritarian rule". They characterized the elections as a "degraded spectacle, dominated by the financial aristocracy's promotion of fascistic forces."

They added, "Official anti-Catalan hysteria and the rise of [fascistic] Vox [party] do not reflect mass support for neo-fascism. Rather, in Spain as across Europe, it reflects the promotion of the far right by the media, the political establishment, and the repressive apparatus of the state." They concluded, "History shows that the only way to defeat the European bourgeoisie's turn towards fascistic politics is to mobilize the working class in a struggle to take power and expropriate the capitalist class."

Events these past six months have substantiated this analysis. In the midst of an explosive rise of mass protests and strikes—from the US auto industry to Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria in the Middle East, Ecuador and Chile in Latin America, and Catalonia in Spain itself—the bourgeoisie has shifted relentlessly to the right. Determined to make no concessions to rising popular demands for social inequality and an end to repression, it relentlessly incites fascistic forces.

Soon after the ICFI statement appeared in April, Vox entered parliament—the first time a far-right party entered the Spanish parliament since 1978 and the end of fascist rule in Spain. The following month, the Supreme Court issued a ruling endorsing the 1936

fascist coup led by Francisco Franco, describing him as "head of state from 1 October 1936 until his death in November 1975." With this unprecedented ruling, Spain's highest court claimed that the proclamation of Franco as head of state in a coup led by a gang of fascist generals on October 1, 1936 was legitimate.

This re-emergence of far-right forces in the Spanish state takes place under the aegis of social democratic acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez.

Sánchez's Socialist Party (PSOE) government, backed by pseudo-left Podemos party, stepped up repression, overseeing a show trial that condemned nine Catalan politicians to nine to 13 years in jail for calling peaceful protests and organizing an independence referendum. The PSOE then aggressively repressed mass protests in Catalonia against the sentences, sending thousands of police to assault protesters. This repression has so far left over 700 injured and over 30 in jail.

Podemos proved to be the fifth wheel of the campaign to prepare a turn to fascistic forms of rule. Terrified at rising strikes and protests, it worked to demobilize and strangle political opposition across Spain. During the summer, it declined to enter a PSOE-led government, fearing anger in Catalonia at the upcoming verdict against the Catalan politicians, all the while pledging to defend the PSOE's "policies on matters of state."

Unable to form a government, the PSOE launched these snap elections based on calls to support police repression in Catalonia.

Most Spanish people do not see Catalonia as a major issue or agree with the state's confrontational approach. Polls show voters' top concerns are unemployment (56.9 percent), followed by the political parties (37.8 percent), economic problems (29.1

percent), corruption (30.5 percent), healthcare (15.7 percent), education (11.1 percent), migration (10.7 percent) and Catalonia (10.5 percent). However, the ruling parties relentlessly flog the issue as political cover to pursue policies of austerity and war that are rejected by a large majority of working people.

The PSOE has pledged to the European Union (EU) that it will impose billions of euros more in social cuts. Together with the right-wing Citizens and Popular Party (PP), it is using the Catalan issue to drown out opposition to militarism and austerity, and shift the political atmosphere far to the right. The latest *El País* poll shows Vox could become the third-strongest party with 46 seats in the 350-seat parliament, behind PSOE with 117 seats and the PP with 92.

The universality of the bourgeoisie's turn to far-right parties in the major EU member states, which have all supported Madrid's anti-Catalan campaign, underscores the significance of these events. In Germany, parliamentary president Wolfgang Schäuble has deplored German pacifism arising from the Nazi defeat in 1945, as Berlin builds up the neo-fascist Alternative Germany. In France, President Emmanuel Macron has hailed fascist dictator Philippe Pétain as he launched a bloody crackdown on "yellow vest" protesters.

It is a fundamental task facing workers and youth across Spain and beyond to support the liberation of the Catalan nationalist prisoners and defend the Catalan population against Madrid's repression. This does not imply any support to the Catalan nationalists, whose separatist agenda and austerity policies work to divide workers across Spain. However, they are clearly being targeted as part of a campaign to build a fascistic police state whose principal target is the working class.

Nearly five decades have passed since the anti-Trotskyist theoretician of the Pabloite International Secretariat, Ernest Mandel, complacently declared that "Europe's big bourgeoisie has once already burned its fingers severely with a fascist experiment. [...] It is all the less likely to be led to repeat the adventure, since the experience also left deep traces among the masses of people, and the suddenly rising threat of new fascism would certainly bring the sharpest reactions."

This historic perspective has been refuted. Three decades after the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union led bourgeois propagandists to proclaim the

"End of History," the death of socialism and the triumph of liberal democracy, the ruling classes across Europe are turning back towards fascism.

While millions of workers are horrified by this prospect, no struggle to defend even the most basic rights is possible from within the parties of the affluent upper-middle class, such as the Stalinist and Pabloite Podemos party and its split-off, Más País (More Country). Despite winning over 5 million votes in 2016, Podemos organized no mass protests against the anti-Catalan campaign. Instead, it backed the verdict against the Catalan political prisoners and announced its sympathies for the police. During the campaign, it constantly appealed for an alliance with the PSOE.

Its bankruptcy is a vindication of the ICFI's critique of the counterrevolutionary 1978 settlement in Spain, and a confirmation of the urgent need to build a Trotskyist alternative. Standing on the basis of the 1978 transition from Francoism to capitalist parliamentary rule, which its political forefathers helped work out with the Francoite regime, Podemos has now thoroughly integrated itself into the PSOE's turn to the right. It is being punished, facing the worst electoral results since its foundation five years ago: polls show it will go from 42 seats to 35.

The decisive issue now is building the Trotskyist revolutionary vanguard of the working class. None of the problems of militarism, EU austerity and the national conflicts whipped up by the bourgeoisie can be solved in a national, capitalist framework. The way forward is a fight to unify Spanish and Catalan workers against the return of authoritarian forms of rule, as part of the unification of the European working class in struggle against the capitalist EU.

The struggle for this perspective requires the building of a new political leadership in the form of sections of the ICFI in Spain and across Europe.



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