

Far-right Vox declares itself main opposition party as Spanish government talks begin

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Amid growing calls for a grand coalition between the social democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) and the conservative Popular Party (PP), the far-right Vox party has declared itself the main opposition party in parliament.

Sunday's elections resulted once again in a hung parliament, the fourth in as many elections since 2015. The PSOE obtained 120 seats, 56 seats short of a majority in the 350-seat parliament. The PP won 87 seats, followed by the far-right Vox, which went from 24 to 52 seats, becoming the third-largest party in parliament. The pseudo-left Podemos party got 35, losing seven since the April 2019 elections, while the right-wing, anti-Catalan party Citizens went from more than 40 seats to 10.

Yesterday after an executive meeting of Vox, its leader Santiago Abascal said: "Spaniards have voted us to make us the opposition. We will vote against any PSOE government. We will not vote for or back a minority PSOE government. Responsibility belongs to others." Calling again for repression of protests in Catalonia, he threatened: "Until we respond to the national emergency in Catalonia, we cannot attend the social emergency of our country."

Meanwhile, a bitter battle is unfolding within the ruling elite over how to form a government. The right-wing press is leading a growing campaign for a PSOE-PP grand coalition. *El Mundo* published an editorial titled, "Pedro Sánchez fails in the elections: it's the time for a grand coalition." It warned that Sunday's election results are "more fragmented and have created a more ungovernable political scenario." Warning of growing social discontent after a decade of deep austerity, it said Spain is "mired in reformist immobility, social fatigue and secessionist threat to national unity."

It added: "Therefore, only a great agreement of constitutional forces, with a reformist vocation and with the spirit of concord inherent in the genesis of our democracy, would allow us to end the blockade. The general interests of Spain demand a great coalition between PSOE and PP. It is an unprecedented formula in our country, but absolutely necessary..."

El Español, which called for a grand coalition before the election, yesterday published an editorial titled, "No excuses or delays: Spain needs the grand coalition." While a PSOE-Podemos government would be "arithmetically possible," it wrote, it would "not guarantee ... a government strong enough to face the challenges facing our country." It concludes that only a "grand coalition remains, unusual in Spain but usual in certain other European countries. The situation is of such gravity that it forces us to make a virtue of necessity."

The pro-PSOE daily *El País*, while not openly advocating a grand coalition, is calling for a PSOE-PP agreement. It wrote, "it is important to explore the possibilities of a minimum programme that allows the legislature to be launched."

For the moment, however, the PSOE has rejected such a possibility. On Monday, its organization secretary, José Luis Ábalos, said, after a meeting of the PSOE executive committee, "We are not going to bank on a grand coalition with a political right that does not accept its share of responsibility." However, he left open the possibility of the PP backing a minority PSOE government: "I hope all political forces will exercise utmost responsibility and not exclude any options on the table... The PP could abstain in order to quickly facilitate a PSOE government."

The other scenario is a PSOE government with Podemos. On Monday, Ábalos said that "our

commitment is to make sure there isn't a third election, but a progressive government." Such scenario would require the PSOE to secure the support of Podemos (35 seats), its right-wing offshoot More Country (2 seats), Citizens (10 seats)—whose leader Albert Rivera resigned yesterday after his party's debacle—and also from the Basque Nationalist Party, Canary Islands Coalition, Teruel Exists, Cantabria Regionalist Party and Nationalist Galician Block.

This indicates the extraordinary fragility of any PSOE government that could be assembled on this basis. To avoid relying on support from the separatist Catalan Republican Left, whose leader Oriol Junqueras was sentenced to 13 years in prison after a show trial organised by the PSOE, Sánchez would need support from at least seven parties to obtain a parliamentary majority.

None of the coalition governments being proposed have anything to offer to the workers. They all represent stepped-up militarism, attacks on democratic rights and social austerity. The acting PSOE government has laid out an austerity plan for the European Commission, including cuts in health care and education, to slash 3.7 billion euros by the end of 2020. The European Commission is demanding 6.6 billion euros in cuts, however.

Last week, Sánchez passed a decree-law without a parliamentary vote, allowing Madrid to intervene "with exceptional and temporary" networks and telecommunications services—telephony, fibre optics, and Internet—against "threats to public order." This allows the government to order the urgent removal, without court approval, of any digital communication for reasons of "public safety," "civil protection," "emergencies," "defence of human life" or "interference with other networks."

The law opens the door to mass censorship amidst 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. It underscores that the rise of Vox is only the most obvious manifestation of the entire ruling elite's drive towards police-state rule.

Vox, a party that until only recently failed to get more than 50,000 votes in a national election, ran a fascistic campaign. It called for the suspension of the Catalan regional government; a state of emergency; sending

troops to suppress mass protests in the region; seizing Catalan TV stations, schools and police units; banning secessionist, nationalist and leftist parties; and revoking laws condemning Francoism.

The rise of Vox, along with other neofascist parties across Europe, is driven from above, by the media, the state and sections of the military-police forces. It has benefitted from the media's endless promotion of Spanish nationalism and police-state repression in Catalonia. Its 52 deputies include retired pro-Francoite generals, former police and Civil Guards, anti-LGBTI activists, holocaust deniers, lawyers and Catholic fundamentalists.

The fact that a fascist party can announce itself to be the main opposition party in parliament is above all due to the role of Podemos. Podemos endlessly called for a coalition government with the pro-austerity and militarist PSOE, even as the PSOE whipped up Spanish chauvinism and called for a new crackdown on the Catalan nationalists.

Podemos also demands that the population endorse the reactionary verdict which has imprisoned nine Catalan activists and politicians as political prisoners; supports police repression in Catalonia; and has run a campaign based on patriotism. At his last campaign meeting in Madrid, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias called Podemos "the only patriotic political force in Spain." He said he was appealing to "the vote of the homeland, of the people, of a people who want democracy to defend themselves against the powerful." This endless promotion of nationalism and the Spanish homeland by Podemos has handed the initiative within official politics to Vox.

Podemos is once again calling for a PSOE-Podemos government. Yesterday Iglesias said, "If after the April elections it was a historic opportunity, now it is a historical necessity." He cynically added that this was "The only way to stop the far right."



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