

PSOE-Podemos loses investiture vote as Spanish right attacks Catalan government

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On Sunday, after a two-day debate, acting Socialist Party (PSOE) Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez failed as expected to obtain the necessary majority of 176 votes in the 350-seat parliament to be invested as the head of a new government.

Sánchez received the support of 166 lawmakers, including those of the PSOE, Unidas Podemos, Basque Nationalist Party, More Country, Compromis, New Canary Islands, Galician Nationalist Bloc, and Teruel Exists. There were 165 against, including the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and Citizens party, the far-right VOX, the Catalan secessionist Together for Catalonia and Popular Unity Candidacy, and the regionalist Navarra Suma, Canary Coalition, Asturias Forum and the Cantabria Regionalist Party.

The Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and Basque EH Bildu, with 18 seats, abstained on Sunday. They hold the key to Sánchez being elected in a second vote, as he requires only a simple majority. However, last-minute desertions within his fragile camp could threaten his bid for power.

The conditions under which the vote occurred are a warning both of the advanced stage of preparations for the suspension of parliamentary democracy by far-right forces linked to the Army and the bankruptcy of the acting PSOE-Podemos government. In the course of nearly two years of effectively ruling Spain, these parties have backed European Union austerity measures and a vicious crackdown in Catalonia after the peaceful 2017 independence referendum. They have created the conditions for the right, led by the fascistic Vox party, to openly campaign for coups and the suspension of elected officials.

During the two-day debate, the right-wing parties accused Sánchez of betraying “the unity of Spain” by cutting a deal for the Catalan ERC to abstain in the first

vote. They also pressed for a pseudo-legal coup to oust the Catalan regional government. This followed calls from far-right generals to oust the PSOE government.

The text of the PSOE-ERC agreement is deliberately ambiguous. It allows the PSOE to posture as a defender of the “unity of Spain” by not committing to a new Catalan independence referendum, while allowing the ERC, whose leaders were incarcerated by the PSOE after a show trial, to claim that it is extracting concessions for Catalan self-government.

The main right-wing parties and their related media outlets—*ABC*, *El Español*, *La Razón* and *El Mundo*—have furiously denounced the deal reached last week. Sánchez aims to “liquidate national sovereignty,” “destroy the unity of Spain” and “sell the country to the separatists” according to their editorials. The pro-PSOE *El País* chimed in, writing: “At this weekend’s investiture debate, prime ministerial candidate Pedro Sánchez must give a full explanation of the deal he has made with ERC on future talks about Catalonia.”

El Mundo appealed to regional PSOE leaders to remove Sánchez so as to stop his “kamikaze path.” Last Thursday, Citizens leader Ines Arrimada held a press conference to announce she would phone all the regional PSOE leaders to ask them to prevent Sánchez’s investiture. In October 2016, Sánchez was removed as general secretary after an internal coup orchestrated by a cabal of bankers, intelligence services and media outlets. The PSOE then backed a PP government.

In Sunday’s debate, PP leader Pablo Casado, along with the far-right Vox and Citizens, focused attention on Catalonia. Denouncing Sánchez as a “sociopath,” a “walking lie” and “the leader of those who want to finish with constitutional Spain,” Casado threatened to impeach Sánchez if he opposed the immediate removal

from office of Catalanian President Quim Torra, stating, “We will act with the same firmness as we have acted against Torra.”

Casado also called for Sánchez to implement Article 155 of the constitution to suspend the Catalan regional government and remove Torra from office if Torra refused to stand down.

As always, Sánchez accepted the right-wing framework of the debate, promising that “Spain is not going to break up and the constitution will not be violated.”

The two years since the 2017 Catalan crisis have shown that the anti-Catalan campaign is an attempt by the ruling class to shift politics far to the right to counter mounting social anger against EU austerity. Amid an international resurgence of the class struggle, Spain is ringed with mass protests and strikes—in Portugal, Algeria and France. Despite the Spanish trade unions’ efforts to suppress strike action, the number of strikes and the amount of work time lost to strikes are rising in Spain as well. The Catalan campaign is aimed at building a police state regime whose central target is the rising militancy of the working class.

The main architects of this repression have been the PSOE and Podemos. They have actively participated in the anti-Catalan campaign, supporting the show trial of Catalan nationalist politicians who backed the independence referendum and then calling on the Spanish population to accept the sentencing of nine Catalan politicians to lengthy prison terms for organising peaceful protests. They supported the brutal police crackdown on mass protests against the show trial, which left hundreds of injured.

The Podemos party is poised to formally take office, with Pablo Iglesias to be named vice-premier to Sanchez, who heads a government of austerity and police state repression.

Such policies have only fueled the rise of Vox and increased its support within the Spanish Army. In December, retired four-star Gen. Fulgencio Coll Bucher, chief of staff of the Spanish Army between 2008 and 2012 and spokesperson for the Vox party in Palma de Mallorca, called for the Army to oust Sánchez. Coll called on the “powers of the state” to “prevent” Sánchez from assembling a majority for a government if it included the ERC.

Last week, PP, Citizens and Vox tried to use the

Central Electoral Commission (CEC) in their bid to prevent the ERC from abstaining. The CEC, an administrative body tasked with “ensuring the transparency of the electoral process and monitoring the performance of the Electoral Census Office,” announced a decision trampling basic democratic rights.

Ruling on an appeal brought by the PP, Citizens and Vox, it decided to revoke the jailed Catalan politician Oriol Junqueras’ seat as a member of the European Parliament. It ignored the 1.7 million votes for Junqueras in the European elections and the EU Parliament’s ruling that Junqueras had parliamentary immunity. The Spanish Supreme Court is set to rule on this matter this week.

The decision was leaked on Twitter by PP leader Casado hours before it was officially announced.

On the same day, the CEC announced it was removing Catalan regional premier Torra from office. It upheld an appeal from the PP, Citizens and Vox claiming that it could revoke Torra’s seat, making him ineligible to serve as regional premier since the Catalan regional premier must be a member of the Catalan parliament. The CEC issued the ruling even though Spain’s Supreme Court had yet to consider an appeal from Torra, who was convicted of disobedience in December for refusing to remove banners calling for the release of Catalan political prisoners.

Torra has received the support of the Catalan parliament to remain in office. If he is removed, he will become the second democratically elected Catalan premier to be ousted from power by Madrid since the 2017 Catalan independence referendum.



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