Right-wing parties carry Madrid region as Podemos suffers election debacle

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The right-wing Popular Party (PP) defeated the ruling Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and Podemos in the May 4 Madrid regional election, running a filthy, anti-communist campaign opposing all social distancing measures to halt the spread of the coronavirus. It was a debacle for the Podemos party, whose general secretary Pablo Iglesias announced his decision to retire from politics.

The PP won 65 seats, four short of a majority in the 136-seat legislature, on 44.7 percent of the vote. The More Madrid party, a Podemos split-off, won 24 seats on 17 percent of the vote and the PSOE another 24 seats on 16.9 percent. The far-right Vox party took 13 seats and 9.1 percent. Podemos fell to last place, with 10 seats on 7.2 percent, and the right-wing Citizens party collapsed. The PP carried 175 of Madrid's 179 localities, including working class "red surburbs" that long voted for the PSOE and its allies.

Incumbent PP regional premier Isabel Díaz Ayuso, who ran based on the slogan "Communism or freedom," declared on Twitter: "Madrid has chosen freedom, concord and a government for all. From Ground Zero we will recover unity, social peace and liberty that all of Spain needs." Vox national party leader Santiago Abascal and Madrid regional lead candidate Rocio Monasterio are negotiating with Ayuso on whether Vox will join a PP-led Madrid regional government.

This vote is the toxic product of the fascistic policies pursued by Podemos, which strengthen the right. Podemos, which Ayuso demagogically attacked as "communists," has in fact implemented fascistic policies of "herd immunity," social austerity and military build-up pursued by right-wing capitalist governments across Europe. Presented with the choice between openly right-wing parties and a cynical pseudo-left party which is also implementing a policy of social murder, voters chose the former over the latter.

In March, Iglesias stepped down as deputy prime minister to run an "anti-fascist campaign" in the Madrid regional elections. He claimed that his goal was "to prevent the far right from taking over the institutions" in Madrid. This was a cynical political fraud, however. He aimed to work out a political framework to continue imposing "herd immunity" and police-state rule on the workers.

During the campaign, the PSOE-Podemos government pledged to end the state of alarm—which allowed it to impose measures like lockdowns, mask mandates, curfews, or other social distancing measures—so the virus could spread freely. Its "herd immunity" policy kept workers at work and youth at school despite mass circulation of the virus. This had already led to over 100,000 COVID-19 deaths, Spain's National Institute of Statistics reported in February.

Committed to a fascistic "herd immunity" policy that has claimed over 1 million lives across Europe, the PSOE and Podemos were incapable of making any effective criticism of Ayuso. Terrified of opposition on their left, they worked rather to reinforce the far right as a tool to suppress the working class. It is a stark warning that the working class cannot fight either the virus or the drive to fascistic-authoritarian rule under the diktat of pseudo-left parties like Podemos.

A striking sign of the duplicity of Iglesias' "anti-fascist" rhetoric was his government's decision to send heavily-armed riot police squads to guard provocative rallies Vox held in working class districts of Madrid. Riot police worked to intimidate counter-demonstrators, whom right-wing legislators publicly denounced in the Spanish Congress.

This handed the initiative to Vox and Ayuso. In a

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campaign marked by fascistic death threats mailed to Iglesias and other candidates, Vox and Ayuso made far-right appeals to disgust with the PSOE and Podemos. Given the murderous record of the PSOE-Podemos government, this was sufficient for Vox and Ayuso to carry the election despite their own politically-criminal record.

Far-right generals who support Vox, who have pledged loyalty to fascism, have called for a coup that would murder "26 million" Spaniards, 55 percent of Spain's population, whom they view as impossible to win to fascism. Ayuso, for her part, displayed open contempt for human life that provoked protests in working class districts of Madrid last year.

"It is likely that practically all children, one way or another, will be infected with coronavirus. … Perhaps they will become infected over the weekend at a family meeting, or in the afternoon in the park or catch it from a classmate. We just don't know," Ayuso had declared. Nevertheless, she added, they "must return to school" and "be socialized." Ayuso also demanded that there be "no strikes or threats" from teachers against her policy of infecting children, as, "This is not the time for 'me, me, me'" from workers.

Ayuso's policies have led to Madrid becoming the Spanish region with the most deaths, at around 24,000. Home to 14 percent of Spain's 47 million population, it has seen 19 percent of Spain's 3.5 million COVID-19 infections. A scandal erupted, moreover, after internal documents emerged showing that Madrid regional officials issued protocols that barred nursing home residents from being transferred to hospitals for life-saving treatment at the peak of the pandemic.

During the regional election, however, Ayuso was allowed to demagogically portray her murderous "herd immunity" policy as a broader assertion of individual freedoms than the PSOE-Podemos government's own move to end social distancing.

Iglesias' reaction to the election result Tuesday was a monument of cynicism and cowardice. While noting that "it consolidated the Trump-ist right," against which he was supposedly devoting himself entirely to fighting, he announced he would abandon politics.

He advanced a reactionary justification: the claim that his empty criticisms of fascism are now too divisive for Spanish politics. "Being useful to Podemos is my greatest aspiration," he said, "but beyond affection for comrades, it is clear that I am not a uniting figure. I am not a figure that can contribute to consolidating this political force, above all when they have converted you into a scapegoat until your role to improve democracy in your country is limited and mobilizes the worst haters of democracy."

"We have failed, we fell far short of the mark," he said, projecting a mood of utter demoralization. He concluded, "I am abandoning all my positions, I am leaving politics, if one means by that professional politics. I will continue serving my country."

Similarly, the PSOE-linked daily *El País* editorialized that the election proved that workers support far-right policies. It wrote: "The result of the Madrid regional elections constitutes a genuine political earthquake full of immediate consequences for the community, but also indirectly on the state of national politics. Madrid's citizens have given powerful support to the platform led by the PP's representative, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, her model of handling the pandemic, her ultra-free-market economic position, and her polarizing political attitude with strong demagogic tints."

There is an urgent danger of both mass COVID-19 deaths and fascistic rule, in Spain and across Europe. However, the arguments of Iglesias and *El País* blaming the workers leave out one thing: the reactionary role they themselves play. In fact, there is deep opposition among workers to calls for military coups, fascist mass murder, mass infections of children, and denying health care to the elderly. This opposition cannot be mobilized, however, under the discredited banner of Podemos.

The critical question is the independent, international mobilization of the working class against the pandemic and the danger of authoritarian rule. This entails building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Spain and internationally in opposition to pseudo-left parties like Podemos.

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