

Spain's July 23 snap election and the bankruptcy of Podemos and Sumar

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Spain's snap general election, called six months ahead of schedule, raises essential political issues facing workers across Europe and internationally. After three years of a social democratic Socialist Party (PSOE) and pseudo-left Podemos government, the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and neo-fascist Vox party are poised to win.

As world imperialism plunges headlong into a military conflict with Russia and China that threatening to spiral into World War III, Spanish imperialism is returning to its fascist roots. Vox is a party composed of former judges, police, and generals with a record of praising Franco's army. His army launched a coup in 1936 leading to a three-year civil war that ended in Franco's victory and the mass murder of 200,000 political oppositionists and left-wing workers. It sent a 45,000-strong Blue Division to assist Hitler's war of extermination against the Soviet Union. The PP is a party founded by Francoite ministers, and led by figures with no political differences with Vox.

A recent poll by *El Mundo* predicted the PP would get 140 seats in the 350-member lower house, while Vox would get 35 seats, one seat short of an absolute majority between them. The PSOE would obtain 102 seats and Sumar, the party backed by Podemos, would get 35 seats.

How is this possible in a country where half of the population grew up in in the Franco era and remembers its horrors? Above all, how is it possible that the chief beneficiaries of deepening opposition across Europe and internationally to the entire capitalist elite's agenda of imperialist war against Russia and the evisceration of workers' rights and living standards at home, are the far-right?

The answer to these questions lies not so much with PP and Vox, as with the Stalinist and Pabloite forces that make up the so-called 'Left Populist' parties such as Podemos and Syriza in Greece, the trade unions, and their various pseudo-left appendages. Founded in 2014 as a "radical democratic" party, Podemos promised to enter

Spanish politics to complete the unfulfilled "democratic" tasks of the transition to democracy after Franco and redistribute wealth towards the poorest.

Once in power in 2020 it instead slashed pensions and wages, pursued a profits-over-lives policy in the COVID pandemic, provided bailouts for major banks and corporations, massively hiked the military budget and joined the NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, arming Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion. Spain's Ibex stock market index is now registering record profits as inflation impoverishes workers.

When workers have attempted to resist paying for the capitalist crisis and war, the reply of the PSOE-Podemos government is violent repression. Striking metalworkers from Cádiz demanding wage increases above inflation faced-down riot police, who assaulted them with tear gas, truncheons, rubber bullets and the deployment of a 15-ton BMR armoured vehicle. Months later, the government mobilised over 23,000 police, the largest police deployment and scabbing operation ever recorded, against 75,000 striking truck drivers protesting soaring fuel prices.

With Podemos implementing such policies, previously unthinkable except under far-right regimes, the Spanish bourgeoisie has been able to legitimise Vox. Podemos has now rebranded itself under Sumar—composed of the same pro-NATO, pro-capitalist politicians of Podemos and led by acting deputy prime minister and member of the Stalinist Communist Party (PCE), Yolanda Díaz.

Deeply rooted opposition to war, austerity, fascism and nationalism exists in the European working class. But it cannot be mobilized without a political reckoning with parties like Podemos/Sumar and similar pseudo-left tendencies across Europe, including the Left Party in Germany, the Left Bloc in Portugal and the New Anti-Capitalist Party in France.

As the development of the class struggle—expressed in

strikes and protests over soaring food prices and low wages in Spain and across Europe—cut across the war effort, the PSOE and Podemos disbanded their coalition government. Determined to make no concessions to rising popular demands for wage increases and an end to war, and terrified of mounting opposition, it is handing power to the far-right, tasked with intensifying repression at home and escalating NATO's war against Russia abroad.

PSOE and Sumar are now waging a political campaign that hands the political initiative to the PP and Vox. Acting Prime Minister Sánchez is parading himself on right-wing news channels and talk shows, saying his victory would be the best guarantee that the European Union will continue pumping billions of euros into the banks and corporations. Sumar's Díaz, meanwhile, is doubling down on identity politics and running a list of pro-austerity, pro-war candidates, hysterically defending NATO's war against Russia in Ukraine.

In an interview on *La Sexta*, Díaz defended her commitment to sending hundreds of millions of euros in military aid to Ukraine, including tanks and rockets, under the pretext that "Ukraine has the right to defend itself" against Putin.

The acting PSOE-Podemos government is not using state resources to carry out measures which would shore up its electoral support. Instead, it has escalated its right-wing and fascist policies. Last week, the government replied to striking metalworkers in Galicia calling for wage increases above inflation by sending the police to ban their protests and attack them with truncheons. Against airline strikes, it imposed draconian minimum services that requires pilots to report to work at a minimum 90 percent of scheduled flights, de facto outlawing industrial action. Its affiliated trade unions, CCOO and UGT, are scrambling to impose concession contracts in other sectors.

PSOE-Podemos have also upheld the EU's fascist "let them drown" policy against migrants and refugees. Last week, the government allowed 61 refugees on a capsized makeshift boat to drown off the coast of the Canary Islands, claiming the lives of 37 migrants, including at least one baby, several children and two teenagers. The event took place a year after the Spanish state committed a massacre against refugees in Melilla that left at least 37 dead.

For the banks and corporations of the Ibex-35 stock exchange, the PSOE-Podemos government has requested an additional 94 billion euros from the EU bailout funds, while promising 24 billion euros in cuts and tax increases

for next year.

Forty-five years ago, the forebearers of the Podemos and Sumar, the Stalinist Communist Party of Spain (PCE), promised that the Spanish ruling elite had turned the page from its fascist past and was now devoted to a new era of peace and capitalist democracy through European integration under the aegis of US imperialism and the NATO umbrella.

This 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 and total war.

While millions of workers are horrified by this prospect—as they witness Vox officials composed of Franco admirers, climate change deniers, rabid anti-LGBT campaigners and ultra-Catholic anti-abortionists entering into local and regional power—no struggle to defend even the most basic rights is possible under the leadership of the parties of the affluent middle class, such as Sumar. War can only be ended and democratic rights and living standards defended by the socialist struggle of the working class.

The rise of Vox under the PSOE-Podemos government confirms this. Its bankruptcy is a vindication of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI)'s critique of the counter-revolutionary 1978 settlement in Spain and of pseudo-left tendencies internationally. Standing on the basis of the 1978 "transition to democracy", which its political forefathers helped work out with the Francoite regime, Sumar is the product of Stalinism's wholesale integration into the Spanish capitalist state.

The critical task is to build an international revolutionary leadership of the working class on the principles of Trotskyism, sections of the ICFI in Spain and internationally.



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