

Spain's Sánchez re-elected prime minister amid mass strikes, protests over Gaza

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Yesterday, Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) renewed a minority coalition government with the pseudo-left Sumar coalition of Podemos and 14 other pro-austerity parties. It followed months of talks between the PSOE, Sumar and the Catalan and Basque nationalists after the right-wing Popular Party (PP) won a plurality in the July elections but failed to form a majority.

Sánchez was re-elected with 179 votes. With a 4-seat majority in the 350-seat parliament, his new government will be weak, fragmented, and dependent on external support from six parties to rule. Besides the 152 seats of PSOE and Sumar, Sánchez needed support from 7 lawmakers of the Catalan Republic Left, 6 from Together for Catalonia, 6 from the Basque-separatist Bildu, five of the Basque Nationalist Party, one of the Galician Nationalist Bloc, and one from the Canarian Coalition.

Sánchez received 171 votes against, from the right-wing PP and neo-fascist Vox, the highest vote ever recorded against a standing prime minister. Had the Catalan or Basque nationalists voted against Sanchez, he would have been defeated.

In return, Sanchez agreed to amnesty 400 people facing legal action over their role in Catalonia's separatist movement in the past decade, and to forgive €15 billion in Catalan government debt. Among those amnestied will be Carles Puigdemont, the former regional premier of Catalonia who was deposed in 2017 after organizing an outlawed secessionist referendum. Puigdemont then fled to Belgium to avoid prosecution.

Sánchez faces mounting opposition from both left and right—from workers and youth mounting strikes and protests against his anti-worker policies, and fascist, anti-Catalan groups calling for a coup.

Yesterday, tens of thousands of high school and

university students across Spain went on strike against the genocidal war in Gaza waged by Israel's fascist Netanyahu regime and its imperialist accomplices led by the United States and the European powers, including Spain's PSOE-Sumar government.

In Valencia, the strike was supported by 90 percent of the students in high schools and 70 percent in universities. Expressing widely shared sentiments, one student, Leiva, told the Catalan online daily *El Nacional*: "We ask the workers' unions to call a general strike because we know that struggle is the only way." Another student, Nina, said, "this conflict has made me think and see how important strikes are."

It took place shortly after workers at Spain's Navantia shipyard in Ferrol denounced the PSOE-Sumar's dispatching of Spanish warships in a US-led battle group now patrolling off the Israeli-Gaza coast. They demanded the immediate return of the warships, which were built by Navantia, and the breaking of commercial and diplomatic ties with Israel. A week before, 1,200 dockworkers in Barcelona announced they would refuse to service any ships carrying war material to Israel.

A mass strike is also underway by 40,000 workers in the major logistics hub of Guadalajara, who are demanding wage increases.

The intersection of mass protests in defense of Gaza and strikes against the global cost-of-living crisis worsened by NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine shows the potential for the working class to mount its own, politically independent intervention into the world capitalist crisis.

These crises will only intensify in the months ahead. The PSOE-Sumar government has pledged to impose €24 billion in social cuts and tax hikes in 2024, as the European Union finances billions in military spending

on the Ukraine war with Russia and Israel's war on Gaza by attacks on wages and social conditions.

Sánchez for his part gave a cynical speech at the investiture, making appeals to gender and identity politics and lying through his teeth about his track record of attacks on the working class.

He said, "We must choose if we want to continue advancing in the dignity of work, the empowerment of women, respect for sexual diversity, the integration of migrants, and the belief that a plural society is a better society. Or if, on the contrary, we support the prophets of hate who want to lock women in kitchens, LGTBI people in closets, and immigrants in refugee camps."

The previous government of Sánchez and Acting Deputy Prime Minister and Sumar leader Yolanda Díaz slashed pensions and labour law protections for workers, handed €140 billion in EU bailout funds to corporations and banks, and savagely cracked down on striking metalworkers and truck drivers. Its profits-over-lives policy on COVID-19 led to over 160,000 excess deaths. Its barbaric incarceration and oppression of migrants includes the infamous massacre of at least 100 refugees at Spain's Melilla enclave.

Sánchez cynically claimed to be a bulwark against the far right. "In front of them," Sánchez said, "there are progressive forces that will not take a step back, forces that know well the problems we face. And they are, furthermore, convinced that these problems can be overcome; and that, if we make the right decisions, Europe and the values it embodies have a bright future ahead of us and can illuminate the rest of the world with its model."

In reality, Sánchez felt compelled to deploy 1,600 policemen to surround the parliament, for fear of a far-right coup. Not since Spain's Transition to parliamentary rule in 1978, after the death of fascist dictator Francisco Franco, have explicit pro-coup threats been heard.

For weeks, Vox leader Santiago Abascal called for "patriotic resistance," calling on the army and cops to intervene. For 12 days, far-right goons, including the American demagogue Tucker Carlson, occupied the street which hosts the PSOE's headquarters in Madrid singing the fascist hymn *Cara al Sol*, making the fascist salute and shouting: "Franco, Franco, Franco." One PSOE councilor in Cádiz was assaulted, and PSOE lawmakers were pelted with eggs yesterday as they

made their way to the parliament.

At the end of the investiture, PP leader Alberto Núñez Feijóo, gave Sánchez a traditional congratulatory handshake as leader of the official opposition. However, Feijóo, who has repeatedly called the election results a "fraud," threateningly told Sánchez: "this is a mistake. You will be the one responsible."

The same security forces upon which the PSOE-Podemos government has rested for four years to assault strikers also threatened Sanchez. An association of paramilitary Guardia Civil declares themselves "ready to spill even the last drop of blood in defense of the sovereignty and independence of Spain and its constitutional order."

The General Council of the Judiciary accused Sánchez of "abolishing the rule of law in Spain." National Court judge García-Castellón suddenly brought up ludicrous charges of terrorism against Puigdemont to try to block the investiture.

Top active and retired military officers are rumored to be drafting a manifesto against the PSOE-Sumar government and its amnesty of Puigdemont and other Catalan nationalists. In December 2020, hundreds of retired officers sent letters to King Felipe VI calling him, as head of the armed forces, to launch a coup against the PSOE-Podemos government. One officer proclaimed his loyalty to Franco and called for the murder of "26 million" left-wing voters and their families to "extirpate the cancer."

These events confirm the warnings after the July elections in Spain. A PSOE-Sumar government will advance anti-working class, pro-war policies that will ultimately benefit the growth of Vox and the PP, while cynically utilizing demands for unity against the right as a political weapon against rising social and political discontent. The critical task now is uniting the growing struggles of workers and youth in Spain with their class brothers and sisters internationally in a global movement against genocide, war, fascism and the capitalist system, including its defenders such as Podemos.



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