Spain’s Izquierda Revolucionaria tries to derail class struggle behind vote for PSOE and its allies

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The mass protests for housing in October and the November 11 strike in Spain are part of a historic eruption of class struggle across Europe. Amid nationwide strikes in France, Italy, Belgium, Portugal and Greece, and mass protests in Germany, Holland, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Serbia and Albania, broad layers of Spanish workers—auto, port, transport, food processing workers—walked out. The class struggle is objectively moving towards a general strike halting the economy and bringing down capitalist governments across Europe.

Such crises inevitably expose the class character of political parties. In Spain, the middle class Izquierda Revolucionaria (IR, Revolutionary Left) is swinging behind the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Sumar government of Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez. It is not trying to deepen and develop mass opposition to PSOE, the Frente Amplio coalition led by Sumar, or its allies like the former PSOE government partner Podemos and regional bourgeois nationalist parties in Catalonia, the Basque Country and Andalucia.

Instead, it works to channel social anger back into the electoral framework and block an working-class movement against both the Sánchez government and right-wing parties like the Popular Party (PP) and the fascist Vox party. It writes:

> “We must vote to defeat the reaction, to prevent [right-wing Popular Party leader] Feijóo from becoming prime minister and [Vox party leader] Abascal deputy prime minister ... In the coming elections, millions of young people and workers will use their vote as one tool among others to prevent the right from reaching the Moncloa Palace. Many will do so holding their noses, without expectations or confidence, by voting for Pedro Sánchez. Others will opt for EH Bildu, the BNG, Adelante Andalucía, as well as the Frente Amplio and Podemos.”

The article acknowledges that “the PSOE’s capitalist policies [...] are what allow the reaction to advance.” It admits that social democracy “is a bulwark of capital,” and that it “will never confront the masters of the system”. Nevertheless, its conclusion is that, in order to block a PP-Vox government, workers must vote for precisely the forces whose policies—bailouts for the rich, austerity and police-state repression for workers, and rearmament and war—created conditions for Vox and the PP to advance.

This is the essence of pseudo-left politics: an analysis that demonstrates the bankruptcy of capitalist parties, followed by a call to support the very same capitalist parties.

Class struggle vs IR’s electoral orientation to the PSOE and Podemos

IR leaves out that nothing will be resolved by these elections, and that the working class must prepare a general strike in Spain and across Europe through a rebellion against the PSOE, Podemos, Sumar, and their allied parties and union bureaucracies. IR, which orbits the PSOE and Podemos, is hostile to such a perspective. It denounces working class opponents of these parties, accusing them of sectarianism. It begins:

> The calling of the election places revolutionary organizations before the question which requires a clear response. In the conditions of a regime of bourgeois democracy in crisis, facing the rise of reactionary formations, do we care who rules over us? Or, viewing the matter from another standpoint, are the right and the far right the same as the social democracy?

IR’s statement today poses an important question: Does it make any difference to us who governs? But it offers a misleading answer. The Marxist answer is not indifference to the differences between bourgeois parties, but the recognition that it is impossible to stop the rise of the far right and of dictatorial forms of rule if workers are tied by a debilitating subordination to pro-war, pro-austerity capitalist parties like the PSOE and Podemos.

Fascism can only be fought by the fullest possible mobilization of the class struggle—which, in turn, requires unyielding struggle for the political independence of the working class from the bourgeoisie.

There is nothing in IR’s statement about the building committees of action to organize the working class independently of the PSOE, Sumar, and Podemos. While it refers to the one-day November 11 strike in Spain as a “general strike,” it does not call for a genuine general strike to block the economy and bring down the capitalist government. It leaves the class struggle in the hands of union bureaucracies are affiliated to the ruling parties, concentrating only on advocating a vote for the bourgeois PSOE and its allies.

In this context, IR’s references to socialism and to Lenin and Trotsky are fraudulent. IR does not advocate a Marxist struggle to transfer state power from the capitalist state to organizations of the working class via a socialist revolution, like the October revolution in Russia. Rather, it seeks to subordinate the working class to the capitalist electoral framework of social democracy.

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IR smears left-wing opponents of the PSOE as sectarian

The mass protests in Spain have seen an outpouring of opposition of workers and youth against the PSOE-Podemos and PSOE-Sumar governments' anti-worker policies. There is also growing sentiment in favor of social equality and a fundamental, revolutionary transformation of society. This has provoked a political crisis for IR, which pursues a policy of subordinating workers and youth to parties like the PSOE and Podemos.

IR tries to defend its line against the radicalization of the workers and youth by dressing up its counterrevolutionary policy in references to socialism, Lenin and Trotsky. Advocating a "Struggle for socialism," IR claims it is fighting to build "A combat party that defends with honesty and forcefulness the program of socialism without childish sectarianism."

But this amounts to a distortion of the lessons of both revolutionaries. Lenin and Trotsky fought sectarianism precisely to defend revolutionary intervention into workers' struggles, not to justify political adaptation to reformist or bourgeois parties. It is not sectarian to refuse to subordinate revolutionary politics to organizations that exert influence over workers. What would be sectarian would be to refuse to intervene in their struggles because of the political influence of these organizations.

IR also tries to conceal its opportunism and tail-endism towards forces that defend capitalism by cultivating a militant image, calling for an "anti-fascist united front." It states:

As for Izquierda Revolucionaria, we will fight with all our power to stop the far right, Vox, the PP, [PP Madrid region governor Isabel] Ayuso, with our writings and with action, with the November 11 general strike, with the anti-fascist united front.

But this is not the workers' united front advocated by Lenin and Trotsky, which is based on united action by working-class organizations against the fascist threat, with each maintaining its political independence. IR is building a "united front" with the PSOE—a bourgeois party which, as it has just admitted, is a "bulwark of capital." That is, it is guarding the left flank of the Spanish bourgeoisie's political bulwark against the working class.

IR refers to Lenin's celebrated work, *Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, to justify this policy. Lenin and Trotsky, IR writes, "educated an entire generation of revolutionaries by fighting opportunism [...] but also ultra-leftism". But it is dishonest to cite this text—which argues for intervening even in reactionary parliaments and trade unions in order to win the masses to revolution by politically exposing the existing leaderships—to justify blocking the class struggle via an electoral orientation to bourgeois parties.

Lenin defended tactical participation in parliamentary institutions and work within reformist workers organizations. However, he never turned these tactics into a general justification for politically subordinating the working class to capitalist rule. On the contrary, the break with capitalism and social democracy, and the building of an independent revolutionary party were essential foundations of Bolshevism—continued, after the emergence of Stalinism, by the Trotskyist movement.

IR, with a few empty references to Marx and Lenin, is advancing not a Marxist perspective for class struggles by the workers against fascism, but a bourgeois vote for the "lesser evil."

Historical roots of IR's orientation to Podemos and the PSOE

IR's statement is not an isolated political mistake, but the reflection of IR's longstanding anti-Trotskyist orientation. IR traces its roots to a British party led by Ted Grant that split from the Trotskyist movement in the 1940s and became a vociferous promoter of Pabloite forces who split from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in 1953. The Grant tendency's alliance with Pabloism against the ICFI's defense of Trotskyism is the decisive issue in understanding its historical perspective and political role.

Adapting to the post-Second World War restabilization of capitalism, the Pabloites wrote off the working class as an independent revolutionary force. They argued that the Stalinist bureaucracy, bourgeois nationalist movements in the colonial countries, and the union and social democratic bureaucracies would be transformed under mass pressure into revolutionary organizations. This repudiation of Trotskyism underlay IR's orientation to Podemos, formed in 2014 as an alliance between a layer of Stalinists and the Pabloite Anticapitalistas party.

IR supported Podemos, presenting it as "a mass political force to the left of the PSOE that could have stormed the heavens." IR endorsed both its entry into the PSOE-Podemos government and the subsequent investiture of Pedro Sánchez. In 2019, it described Podemos's entry into the government as "an event of historic importance that has raised enormous expectations" an hailed as "the result of the great mass mobilization that has shaken the Spanish state."

In the 2021 Madrid regional elections, IR announced a campaign involving 11,000 posters and 121,000 leaflets in support of Pablo Iglesias, one of Podemos's founders. When the party suffered an electoral collapse in June 2023, IR sought to attribute its failure to mistakes by its leadership and its collaboration with the PSOE, an explanation that the WSWS characterized as "political fraud" intended to cover up nearly a decade of support for the party.

In November 2023, IR maintained that a PSOE-Sumar government was "a million times preferable to a PP-Vox government" and that "it would be profoundly wrong for the left-wing forces represented in parliament to withhold their critical support for Sánchez's investiture".

IR's brief references to Lenin, Trotsky and socialism cannot paper over its longstanding Pabloite orientation to social-democratic and Stalinist organizations of the Spanish capitalist establishment, against which workers and youth are now rebelling. While speaking of the November 11 strike, it ignores the struggle for a working class rebellion against the PSOE-led government to carry out a genuine general strike. While speaking of socialism, it orients to social-democratic tools of Spanish capitalism.

But far-right reaction cannot be defeated within the framework of bourgeois politics. The struggle to mobilize the working class, unify workers struggles in a European general strike, and carry out a socialist revolution requires building a revolutionary party based on Trotsky's irreconcilable defense of Bolshevism against imperialism and Stalinism. It requires building not IR, but sections of the ICFI across Europe fighting to replace the European Union with the United Socialist States of Europe.

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