Spanish elections: What way forward for workers against austerity, fascism and war?

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Sunday's general election in Spain poses fundamental political questions to workers and youth across Europe and internationally.

The last two months have seen a mass movement of workers and youth in Spain and across Europe. In Spain, housing protests, strikes in rail, metalworking, health and education, and the one-day nationwide strike of November 11 came as youth protests and strikes swept the continent, with one-day national strikes in France, Italy and Greece and protests against military service in Germany. Millions oppose rising living costs, the diversion of social spending to the military, police violence and the official promotion of neo-fascism.

However, while the protests in Spain and across Europe have a left-wing character, the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the fascist Vox party have led the polls ever since Socialist Party (PSOE) Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called the election on October 5. For the first time since the end of Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship in 1978, which came to power during the 1936–1939 Spanish Civil War, the far right is poised to enter the government of Spain.

How is it that, despite rising left-wing protests, neo-fascists are at the gates of power across Europe? Marine Le Pen's National Rally leads the polls for next year's French presidential election, Giorgia Meloni's Brothers of Italy are in power, and the Alternative for Germany is the main opposition party in that country. Spain highlights the critical issues facing workers internationally: the bankruptcy of the entire capitalist establishment and the necessity of independent, revolutionary struggle by the working class.

The "progressive" coalition governments that Sanchez and the PSOE led first with Podemos (2020-2023) and then with the Podemos split-off Sumar (2023-2026) were hailed as models by Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, Italy's Democratic Party, and Jeremy Corbyn in Britain. The union officials who called the November 11 strike based it on explicit support for Sanchez's government. Yet it is the PSOE, Podemos, Sumar and their allies that bear primary responsibility for the rise of Vox.

The housing protests that erupted after the September 23 eviction of 87-year-old Maricarmen Abascal, carried out by the National Police, and her death two weeks later expressed mass opposition to the record of the "progressive" governments. These governments handed tens of billions of euros in EU pandemic recovery funds to major corporations and nearly tripled military spending, to €34.3 billion (2.1 percent of GDP) last year, while workers' living standards steadily eroded. Rents, energy and food prices surged far ahead of wages.

The PSOE-Podemos and PSOE-Sumar governments relentlessly strengthened the military-police machine and met strikes with brutal repression. Sanchez sent riot police and armored vehicles against striking metalworkers in Cádiz in 2021, deployed 23,000 police against the 2022 truckers' strike and organized a massive police operation against this month's November 11 strike. Sánchez joined NATO's reckless escalation of the war with Russia in Ukraine, spending billions to arm the Ukrainian regime. Spanish weapons armed Ukraine's neo-Nazi Azov Battalion.

Podemos left the government in 2023 and sought to posture as an opponent of the Gaza genocide, after nearly four years in a government that expanded arms trade with Israel. The PSOE-Sumar government continued to let the US and NATO use military bases in Spain and kept up arms trade with Israel worth millions of euros.

The movement in Spain and across Europe has

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revealed the depth of working class opposition to austerity, police-state dictatorship and war. The way forward is to mobilize this opposition against the capitalist oligarchy and its political defenders.

This requires the independent mobilization of rank-and-file workers in Spain and across Europe, freeing the class struggle from the suffocating influence of social democracy, middle class pseudo-left parties like Podemos and the union bureaucracies tied to them. It requires principled, uncompromising opposition to parties like the PSOE, Podemos and Sumar.

On Sunday, millions of workers and youth will no doubt hold their noses and vote for the PSOE or its allies, trying to keep Vox out of power.

Vox calls for accelerated rearmament, expanded police powers, militarized borders, a ban on separatist parties and draconian austerity. It proposes €64 billion in tax cuts for the wealthy and €112 billion in public spending cuts, or 6.5 percent of GDP. Cuts on this scale would mean a historic regression in health care, education and the living standards of the population. It is a policy of global war and mass impoverishment on the scale proposed by the National Rally in France, or fascistic Argentine President Javier Milei's first-year austerity program.

But the growth of the far-right danger cannot be fought based on a vote for Sanchez and his allies. The claim that such parties constitute the "lesser evil" has been used again and again to block the class struggle in a manner that can only strengthen the capitalist class and the forces of political reaction.

Organizations that call for a vote for Spain's current ruling parties on "anti-fascist" grounds on November 29 will support them on the same basis after the election. The PSOE, Podemos and Sumar oversee austerity and war, and are tools of the same capitalist oligarchy that promotes Vox. Their record over the last seven years is a warning that they will pursue policies ever closer to those of the far right if they are left in power.

As at the time of Franco's July 1936 coup, which launched the Spanish Civil War, Europe is teetering on the brink of total war and dictatorship. If the working class does not intervene to stop the NATO-Russia war and the official promotion of neo-fascism, it faces the militarization of the economy, the destruction of social services to fund war and escalation towards nuclear conflict. Workers cannot halt capitalism's descent into the abyss if their struggles are hamstrung by debilitating alliances with pro-imperialist parties like the PSOE or Podemos.

Whether the election brings the PSOE or the fascistic right to power, class struggle and anti-fascist sentiment will continue to grow among workers and youth. The decisive factor is the international growth of the class struggle.

The working class must be mobilized more broadly and, above all, more consciously than it has been until now. Workers in factories, transport and public services have the power to bring the economy to a standstill and paralyze the machinery of war and police repression in Spain and across Europe.

To do this, workers and youth must build independent, democratically-controlled rank-and-file action committees in workplaces and schools and prepare a European general strike. Such a strike would not be a symbolic protest aimed at defending existing governments, but the starting point of a struggle by the European working class for power and the socialist overturn of capitalism.

The crisis in Spain shows in the starkest terms that the working class needs a new political leadership. Growing social opposition must be armed with an international socialist program to expropriate the banks and corporations, end imperialist wars, and place the economy under the democratic control of the working class. This means opposing the capitalist European Union based on the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe.

The Socialist Equality Parties in Europe and the International Committee of the Fourth International are fighting to build a revolutionary leadership based on this program, and appeal for support on this basis to workers and youth mobilizing in struggle in Spain, across Europe and beyond.



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