

Podemos pleads with Socialist Party to form a government in Spain

By Paul Mitchell
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Attempts to form a new government in Spain have stalled, raising the possibility of fresh elections being called.

The breakup of the decades-long two-party system in the general election in December left a hung parliament divided among four main parties, the Popular Party (PP), Socialist Party (PSOE), Podemos and Ciudadanos (Citizens).

Attempts to cobble together a coalition have repeatedly failed—the most recent being that between the PSOE and Citizens. That pact required the support of Podemos, but to be seen to be cooperating with Citizens would have totally exposed the political pretensions of the pseudo-left party.

King Felipe VI is to hold a new round of consultations beginning April 25. Podemos is making a last ditch attempt with pleas to the PSOE to form a so-called “Government of Change” that would include the Communist Party-led United Left (IU) and Valencian nationalist Compromís and require the support or abstention of Catalan and Basque nationalists.

If a power-sharing agreement is not reached by May 2, new elections will be held on June 26. Polls suggest the voting will be similar to that in December, although the situation is volatile and difficult to predict as 40 percent of voters are still undecided.

On Monday, Podemos announced the results of a referendum that was held last week after three-way talks with the PSOE and Citizens broke down. Podemos members were asked two questions:

Do you want a Government based on the PSOE-Citizens pact?

Do you agree with our proposal for a Government for Change with Podemos, En Comú Podem (Podemos in Catalonia), and En Marea (a coalition in Galicia

involving Podemos, the Anova-Nationalist Brotherhood, the IU and various municipal alliances)?

Both options were variants on a coalition with the PSOE.

Announcing the results, Podemos Organisation Secretary, Pablo Echenique, declared that of the party’s 393,538 registered members just 149,513 (37 percent of the total) voted. Some 88 percent opposed the PSOE-Citizens pact and 92 percent backed the Government of Change proposal.

That so few bothered to vote in such a critical decision reveals the true level of commitment among Podemos members, or more properly what its real membership is. Echenique attempted to downplay the low turnout, claiming that the voting registration system was changed so that only those who had “regular involvement” with the party could participate.

After the result was announced Podemos number two and Political Secretary Inigo Errejón declared, “The results are clear and the popular mandate will guide the next steps.”

One of the party’s co-founders and Secretary of Political and Social Analysis, Carolina Bescansa, warned the PSOE that if it did not “take the hand we are holding out for a coalition government” it would have “many difficulties” in an election campaign. Podemos mayor of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, called on “all persons able to reach an agreement” to enable the formation of a “government of change” in order to prevent a new election and end the “cycle” of the PP in power.

“One of the things I like best is how in this city municipal government, we are in the minority [but] we achieved agreements,” Carmena explained, adding that “My view is moving away from the use of political parties as instruments of representation in

representative democracy. I orient more to the establishment of broad fronts...”—that is, power at any cost.

The referendum was a manoeuvre by the Podemos leadership to shield itself from the charge that it was responsible for new elections should they be called and bolster its negotiations with the PSOE. This week, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias called on PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez to ballot his members on Podemos’ “Government of Change” proposals.

Central to the proposals were what Iglesias called 20 “concessions” to the PSOE that he had made with “terrible pain”. They represent a wholesale capitulation to the austerity regime demanded by the European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank and reveal the fraudulent nature of Podemos’ claim to be an anti-austerity party.

In reply to those who called the concessions a betrayal of Podemos’ principles, a party spokesperson was forced to state with unparalleled cynicism, “We will continue in our line. Yield, yield and yield. But yielding without betraying the backbone of our national project.”

In the event, Podemos’s pleas for a deal were rejected with Iglesias declaring, “On the part of the PSOE we received an explicit refusal to explore the possibility... They were very clear in telling us their framework is the only possible, as they are firmly tied to Citizens.”

However, PSOE Congress spokesman Antonio Hernando, revealed that of Podemos’ 20 proposals the PSOE was happy with 70 percent of them. This statement alone is ample evidence that the political differences between Podemos and the PSOE, a right-wing party that for decades has proven in practice its pro-capitalist, anti-working class credentials, are minimal. A last-minute agreement is entirely possible, as was shown in Greece where last year Podemos’ ally Syriza formed a government with the far-right Independent Greeks in order to impose savage austerity measures.

Like Syriza, Podemos is a bourgeois party that is hostile to the working class and supports the framework of war and austerity imposed by the European Union. It reflects the interests of upper middle class layers of entrepreneurs, professionals, and academics who will implement whatever is required to

get a shot at state power.

However, Sánchez is in the grip of a serious dilemma. On the one hand, the PSOE faces the possibility of electoral annihilation should there be any rapprochement with the PP—which was thrown into deeper crisis over the resignation last Friday of José Manuel Soria from his positions as Congress deputy, Industry Minister and PP regional chairman in the Canary Islands after his name appeared in the Panama Papers. On the other, the majority of the PSOE leadership, led by the president of Andalusia, Susana Diaz, have been vehemently opposed to any alliance with Podemos and would prefer one with the PP.

This week acting deputy PP prime minister, Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, warned Sánchez that “all his left-wing aspirations” had failed and demanded he drop his opposition to talks with the PP. The PP number three, Fernando Martínez-Maillo, said, “We are going to keep until the last day our proposal for a grand coalition.”

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