

Amid mass abstention, right-wing PP wins Spanish elections

By Alejandro López
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Six months after the December 20 elections failed to produce a government, yesterday's elections confirmed the deep popular disaffection and the collapse of the two-party system that has dominated the Spanish political life since the collapse of the fascist Franco regime in 1978.

With 98 percent of the votes counted, the conservative Popular Party (PP) has won the elections with 33 percent of the vote, obtaining 137 seats, still far from the 176 seats necessary for an absolute majority in the 350-seat parliament.

The Socialist Party (PSOE) came second, with its worst electoral results since the first post-Franco elections in 1977, with 22 percent of the vote and 85 seats. The pseudo-left Unidos Podemos (UP) alliance of Podemos and the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) parties got 21 percent and 71 seats, the same result as the last elections. The right-wing Citizens party won 13 percent and 32 seats.

The nationalists and separatists from Catalonia (CDC and the ERC), the Basque country (PNV and EH Bildu) and the Canary Islands (CC) sum up 25 seats.

The results are also marked by record levels of abstention, with 32 percent of the electorate abstaining, a particularly clear indication of the deep unpopularity of the regime. Despite deep social opposition to austerity, to the EU and militarism among masses of working people, no party has emerged that speaks to this sentiment.

It is particularly humiliating for the Unidos Podemos led by Pablo Iglesias, the coalition put together by the Stalinist-led United Left and Podemos after the December 2015 elections to overpass the PSOE. Not only have they failed in this, but they lost one million votes compared to December, a sign that UP is increasingly not seen as an alternative, particularly

among youth.

The results heighten the political crisis in Spain. Whichever coalition of parties is cobbled together to form a new government, it will be dedicated to imposing even more savage attacks against the working class.

During the election campaign, the major four parties expressed their commitment to imposing austerity and carrying out the dictates of the European Union. As in Greece under Syriza's Alexis Tsipras, or François Hollande's Socialist Party in France, the next government intends to use the security forces to try to suppress the resistance of workers and youth to the ever-escalating attacks on democratic and social rights.

Who will head such a government is open to question, with possible governments ranging from a PP-Citizens government with the abstention of the PSOE during the government investiture, to a grand coalition between the PSOE and the PP, or an "independent" technocratic government.

A so-called "government of change" between the PSOE-UP would require the support of Catalan and Basque nationalists, conditioned on Spain supporting a referendum in independence in Catalonia—an option which the PSOE has refused until now.

Any government emerging out of this highly fragmented parliament will be weak, divided, deeply unpopular, and committed to austerity and militarism.

If the ruling class is able to prepare such a confrontation it is due to a great extent due to the role played by the UP. The UP is a coalition between the Stalinist-led United Left and Podemos under Iglesias. Podemos, founded in January 2014, grew its electoral influence by exploiting deep-seated hostility to the political establishment and EU austerity policies. However, it proved to be another pseudo-left trap to

divert growing social anger, articulating the interests of layers of the middle and upper middle class.

On austerity, Podemos has repeated as examples of good governance its “mayors of change” in Barcelona and Madrid, where Podemos-led political fronts have cut public spending and the debt. The agreement between Podemos and the United Left commits the coalition to a “slower deficit reduction.”

Responding to the growing geo-political tensions throughout the world, Podemos has made clear its pro-militarist stance and readiness to defend Spain’s role in NATO. It included former General and Chief of Staff Julio Rodríguez in its electoral lists, an unprecedented move in a country where the working class has suffered under a military dictatorship in living memory.

During the last month, from its demagogic critiques of the “caste” and the “oligarchy,” referring to the PSOE and the PP, the UP has based its strategy wholeheartedly with forming a government with the PSOE, the oldest party in Spain and the main ruling party in the post-Franco era.

This is the party that embraced NATO, entered Spain into the EU, supported the neo-colonial wars in Libya and Afghanistan, and associated with the first post-2008 economic crisis’ austerity measures under José Luís Rodríguez Zapatero, whom Iglesias dubbed the “best” Prime Minister in Spanish history.

The pseudo-left forces orbiting around or integrated in Podemos like the Pabloite Anti-capitalists (Anticapitalistas), In Struggle (En Lucha) and the Militant (El Militante) have responded to Podemos’ rightward shift by further integrating themselves into it. In yesterday’s elections, they called for workers and youth to support UP, aiming to subordinate workers to a pro-austerity UP-PSOE government and disarm them in front of the advancing social counterrevolution.

Contrary to assertions that the end of the Franco regime inaugurated an unprecedented period in Spanish history, marked by social prosperity and political stability, the current period is one of intensification of the class struggle, as social tensions erupt across Europe. The ground is being prepared for an explosive confrontation between the workers and youth and a government committed to attacks on the workers.

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