

Podemos calls for alliance with right-wing Citizens Party in Spain

By Paul Mitchell
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Iñigo Errejón, number two in the leadership of the pseudo-left Podemos Spain and candidate for premier in next year's Madrid regional election, has called for a "grand deal" with the new right Ciudadanos (Citizens).

Errejón called for Ciudadanos to work together with Podemos in a "transitional cabinet" to "regenerate" the institutions in the Madrid region and restore their "dignity," following the resignation of Popular Party (PP) regional premier Cristina Cifuentes last month in a corruption scandal.

Errejón declared, "I want the next regional premier to be elected through a grand deal with the PSOE [Socialist Party], Ciudadanos and us for a democratic alternative that will make democratic elections take place in a better political climate within a year."

This week, Ciudadanos rejected Errejón's appeal and agreed to a new "clean" PP candidate for regional premier, Ángel Garrido. However, Errejón will not be overly disappointed. His whole anti-PP campaign was a cover for junking whatever remains of Podemos' radical phrase-mongering to facilitate Podemos' further integration into bourgeois politics.

Errejón has insisted that Podemos rectify its "original sin" of refusing to make agreements with other parties. He has dropped the terms "triple alliance" and "dynastic bloc"—references to the PP, PSOE and Ciudadanos—and now talks about the "regenerative" and "democratic forces" comprising Podemos, PSOE and Ciudadanos.

He also insists that Podemos "abandon the catastrophic discourse" about the economy, which marked the party's launch, where it spoke about nationalisations of top companies and control of the banks. It must now develop, in words that would resonate with its military cadre, "a general project of order with authority and prestige."

Errejón's public embrace of Ciudadanos confirms the populist, nationalist and pro-capitalist politics at the heart of Podemos.

Guided by Stalinist-influenced academics and theoretically rooted in a postmodernist rejection of Marxism and the

revolutionary role of the working class, Podemos articulates the interests of affluent layers of the middle class. Its orientation to Ciudadanos is an expression of the global phenomenon of the pseudo-left's right-wing trajectory.

Syriza made its sordid deal with the small xenophobic Independent Greeks (ANEL) party only after it came to power in Greece. Podemos is prostituting itself, first to the PSOE and now to Ciudadanos, even before it has a sniff of some future power-sharing arrangement and knowing it will be consigned to functioning as a junior partner.

Ciudadanos is a neo-liberal formation, which wants to impose deep structural reforms in Spain's labour market, health and pension systems, whilst reducing corporation tax and top income tax. It is the most determined advocate of Spanish nationalism, criticising the PP government for its lack of resolve in Catalonia and, by extension, the whole of Spain. This week, Ciudadanos leader Albert Rivera threatened PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy that Ciudadanos would stop supporting his minority government if he did not "harden" his position in Catalonia.

Ciudadanos has been fashioned from a once obscure anti-separatist party in Catalonia into a Spain-wide party winning over 3.5 million votes in the 2015 general elections and 40 of the 350 seats in the Congress of Deputies. Polls suggest it would become the largest party in Congress if elections were held now, having made dramatic headway since the Catalan independence crisis erupted last year. Its ability to win support in Spanish-speaking working class areas in Catalonia is a devastating indictment of the PSOE and its junior partner, Podemos, which make no significant appeal to any section of the working class, let alone advance a perspective for class unity.

According to London School of Economics professor Luis Garicano, Ciudadanos' main policy architect, "We have to reform everything except the Monarchy and the borders of Spain."

In 2014, Garicano told the *Financial Times*, "A stable two-party political system has been among Spain's greatest strengths in the post-Franco era. But since 2008 the brutal

economic crisis—together with growing evidence that large sections of both parties have operated as engines of patronage, graft and influence peddling—has undermined the legitimacy of the system and allowed two existential threats to the constitutional order to flourish”. He listed the two threats as the break-up of Spain--due to the crisis in Catalonia--and the growth of working class opposition, which he identified with the growth of Podemos.

Errejón felt confident to launch his overture to such a nakedly right-wing outfit because his appointment to head the party’s list was engineered by his erstwhile rival, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias, to head off a bitter factional crisis, including an attempt to topple him. As part of the deal Ramón Espinar, who controls the Madrid regional committee and is allied with Iglesias, was appointed number three on the list.

Little of substance separates the two factions, and it was never more than a question of how far the party should lurch to the right. Iglesias prefers the sort of confidence-and-supply agreements that the Portuguese Socialist Party (PSP) and the Podemos-like Left Bloc have agreed, whilst Errejón favours formally joining in a coalition or filling ministerial positions.

Errejón’s call for “co-operation” with Ciudadanos is proof that there never really was much separating the two parties. Both emerged as the decades-long two-party set-up involving the PP and PSOE began to crumble following the 2008 global economic crash and was further discredited during years of austerity. Ciudadanos and Podemos both sought to divert opposition to the social counter-revolution against the working class behind criticisms of the PP/PSOE “caste” and its cronyism and corruption—Ciudadanos from the right and Podemos from an ostensible left standpoint.

Support for Podemos has plummeted since it was launched four years ago with a popular anti-austerity message. In less than a year, Podemos has gone from being an alternative to the ruling PP to the fourth-ranked political force, behind Ciudadanos, and ever further from its goal of surpassing the PSOE. The working class has witnessed first-hand how Podemos rules in the local “governments of change”—imposing austerity, cuts, strike breaking and attacks on migrants. Polls suggest that only around half of its supporters (some 2.7 million people) will vote for it again, that one-quarter are “demobilized” and the remainder would vote for another party.

The Pabloite Anticapitalistas has adopted its usual charade of criticising the capitulation and betrayals of the Podemos leadership, before insisting that the party—on which it depends for positions and privileges in the state machine—can be “saved” by creating a “new space” with other “actors” outside of Podemos to step up the pressure on

Iglesias, Errejón et al.

Raúl Camargo, Madrid Regional Assembly deputy and Anticapitalistas leader, complained that Podemos “is moving people away from participation, generates disaffection in broad sectors of society and promotes a logic of ruthless competition more typical of a company than of a political space that aspires to transform society.”

In the next breath he declared, “we are going to start a movement to try to convince everyone (including Errejón-Espinar) that there is another way to do the things that can be more useful, both to win and to transform things.”

Podemos spokesperson in the Assembly and Anticapitalistas leader Lorena Ruiz-Huerta declared, “I cannot accept the offer of Errejón and Espinar for me to join their list, which is not built around a political project for the Community of Madrid, but to a distribution of seats 60-40.” *El Español* revealed that its Anticapitalistas sources had said that such protestations were more “a plea for attention than a real threat to leave.”

The Iglesias faction brushes aside the Anticapitalistas’ pleas saying they only represents 15 percent of Podemos and would not have any future outside the party. The Errejón faction, *El Español* continues, say they want to “reach out” to the Anticapitalistas, but they will not lose any sleep if they do not succeed.

Podemos co-founder Juan Carlos Monedero criticized the Anticapitalistas because, “Podemos has to build a Broad Front and all are needed, otherwise, the right will continue to govern.” The Anticapitalistas, Monedero warned, “should also think that the last time they stood by themselves [in an election] they received 23,000 votes in Spain, whereas now they are perhaps the Trotskyist group with the greatest institutional presence in the world.”

He hoped that this responsibility would “maybe make them change their mind.”

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