

Podemos proposes to “co-govern” with Spain’s Socialist Party government

By Alejandro López
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The Podemos party is negotiating to enter into an open coalition with Spain’s minority Socialist Party (PSOE) government. Three years after its Greek ally Syriza, the “Coalition of the Radical Left,” took power and betrayed its election promises to end European Union (EU) austerity, Podemos is signaling to the ruling elite that it has at most minor differences with the PSOE’s militarist and austerity agenda.

Last May, the PSOE took office after organizing a no-confidence vote with Podemos and Catalan and Basque nationalists to oust the minority, right-wing Popular Party (PP) government. The PSOE government has stumbled from one crisis to another, however, trying to present a “left” face by playing up its female ministers or proposing to move the remains of fascist dictator Francisco Franco from his official state tomb. At the same time, it is deepening the PP’s austerity, military spending increases, attacks on migrants, and incarceration and prosecution of Catalan nationalist politicians.

Having played a key role to garner regionalist and nationalist votes to support the PSOE’s no-confidence motion against the PP, Podemos is now negotiating a possible parliamentary coalition to prop up the PSOE. Speaking to Telecinco, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias said he sees himself as “a partner in government” with the goal of “co-governing together from parliament.”

Last Thursday, Iglesias also met with Sánchez to discuss the 2019 budget. “There are good vibes, it’s a good start; if we do reach an agreement we would like to see out the term to 2020,” he said at a press conference after a two-and-a-half-hour meeting. He added, “We have advanced towards an agreement on the budget.” This would open the way for Madrid to pass a new austerity budget for 2019 next month, once

it submits its draft budget to the EU.

Iglesias was shelving the criticisms Podemos raised of the PSOE this summer, calling for talks with the European Commission and for repealing the Organic Law on Budgetary Stability and Financial Sustainability. Podemos and the PSOE did not disagree over austerity, however, but over the tempo at which to implement EU demands. Now, Podemos is making clear that it is willing to jettison even these minor, essentially symbolic differences in order to show the ruling class that it can be trusted in government.

Underlying Podemos’ offer to “co-govern” with the PSOE is an attempt to stabilize the government amid growing economic crisis and social opposition. The end of the summer tourist season saw the destruction of 300,000 jobs in one day, a new record even in Spain’s bankrupt labour market. The downturn also provoked a fall in retail sales in July of 0.4 percent year-on-year.

At the same time, according to the Spanish Confederation of Employers’ Organisations, the main business lobby, strikes called between January and August led to the loss of 9.5 million hours of work, up 46.43 percent from 2017. There were 348 strikes in Spain during that time, in which 633,936 workers participated.

The consolidation of a PSOE-Podemos coalition in parliament will be no less reactionary than a minority PSOE government supported by Podemos from the outside. Indeed, as Podemos negotiates with the PSOE, it is not demanding that the PSOE abandon its militarist policies and escalating attacks on social and democratic rights. Its silence denotes consent to the EU-PSOE agenda.

The new government’s first measure was to take over the previous PP government’s austerity and militarist budget. The budget includes cuts of 13 percent in

education, 8 percent in health, 27 percent in research and technology, 35 percent for culture and 58 percent in infrastructure. At the same time, it showered the military and intelligence apparatus with billions of euros, mandating a 10.5 percent increase in military expenditure, the largest in a single year since the fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco, and 7.4 percent funding increase for the National Intelligence Centre.

On migration, after having allowed the Aquarius refugee vessel to dock in Valencia, PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez is supporting neighbouring Morocco's large-scale crackdown on thousands of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. So far, two migrants have died in this operation. The PSOE also carried out an unprecedented mass expulsion of 116 Sub-Saharan migrants to Morocco last month.

Sánchez is also continuing the crackdown on Catalan nationalists that has unfolded since the brutal police assault on peaceful voters in last October's referendum on Catalan secession from Spain. He has threatened to again suspend Catalonia's elected government by invoking Article 155 of Spain's 1978 constitution. Prosecutors recently reaffirmed that the referendum was a "violent insurrection" and called on the Supreme Court to condemn Catalan politicians on charges of rebellion, punishable by 15 to 25 years in prison.

Last Wednesday, the Interior Ministry announced that it would send around 1,000 police officers to Catalonia for the September 11 celebrations of the region's national day.

The most virulent criticism of the PSOE from Podemos emerged last week, when the Ministry of Defence announced it was suspending the sale of 400 laser-precision bombs to Saudi Arabia. Podemos' criticisms came from the right, however.

Even though the contract amounted to €9.2 million, or 1 percent of the total €932 million in Spanish weapons sales to the Saudi monarchy since 2015, it soon emerged that Riyadh was threatening to cancel a €1.8 billion contract with Spain to build five Corvette warships. José María "Kichi" González, the Podemos mayor of Cádiz, where the warships are being built, attacked the PSOE for jeopardising the contract. He falsely portrayed the sale of warships as "the dilemma between producing weapons or eating" referring to defense industry jobs in Cádiz.

Iglesias came to the defence of the mayor, stating that

"the problem is that Spain has been selling arms to one of the states that favored ISIS, and we are concerned about violation of Human Rights [...] but I understand that Kichi puts workers before."

By the end of the week—under pressure from the Saudis, Podemos and sections of the PSOE—the government backed down. "The government is working to maintain good relations with Saudi Arabia and to defend the contracts for the construction of five Corvettes in Navantia's shipyards," government spokeswoman Isabel Cela said.

The Saudi-bomb affair has once again exposed that Iglesias and Podemos are imperialists and militarists. It continues their track record of defending the police and the army and recruiting its members—most prominently former Chief of the Armed Forces and Podemos member General Julio Rodríguez, who led Spain's participation in the 2011 NATO war in Libya.

PSOE-Podemos talks confirm the assessments of Podemos made by the WSWs. As a newcomer in the December 2015 elections, Podemos had ranked third, winning over 5 million votes, or 20 percent. As the bourgeois parties struggled to elect a new government, the WSWs warned that Podemos' repeated pleas to form a government with the PSOE aimed "to enforce further unpopular austerity measures on working people and the entire Spanish population."

We warned: "Podemos, regardless of its rhetoric, does not aim to carry out an alternative or radical policy. Instead, like Syriza ... it aims to give a face lift to a discredited political establishment—in this case, working with the PSOE, which has waged imperialist wars and enforced savage austerity measures against the Spanish people." This assessment has been vindicated.

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