

Spain: Podemos manifesto defends constitution, urges coalition with Socialist Party

By Alejandro López and Paul Mitchell
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The Podemos party once railed against the “regime of 1978,” a reference to the two-party system that followed the 40-year-long dictatorship of General Francisco Franco. It is now the most avid defender of the bourgeois Spanish Constitution on which this regime was established.

The pseudo-left party’s April 28 election manifesto is divided into 10 chapters mirroring the articles of the Constitution. Its aim is to secure ministerial positions for Podemos in a Socialist Party (PSOE)-led coalition government. Podemos claims that by being part of a PSOE government, rather than propping it up from the outside as it has done for the last 10 months, it will be able to exert pressure more directly and somehow turn the PSOE to the left.

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias declared, “The Constitution must be present in this campaign; I hope that those who proclaim themselves constitutionalists are willing to make it happen.”

“We defend the strict application of articles of the Constitution that protect people, but are not implemented,” he added, a reference to articles relating to the provision of full employment and “decent” housing, health and welfare systems.

These concessions were included in the 1978 Constitution to legitimise the filthy compromise between the PSOE and the Communist Party (PCE) with the Francoites, the Church and the Spanish army to “forgive and forget” the crimes of fascism. They were integral to the PSOE and PCE securing the so-called “peaceful transition” to bourgeois democracy after Franco’s death by heading off a revolutionary reckoning with the Spanish bourgeoisie by the working class.

The clause in Article 128 stating that “Essential resources or services may be reserved by law to the public

sector especially in the case of monopolies” was explicitly promoted by the Stalinists during the Transition. PCE leader Santiago Carrillo claimed it would “make socialist transformations possible” through parliamentary reform and without revolution.

The PCE’s critical role in preventing the workers struggles of the 1970s from developing into a revolutionary overthrow of the regime was understood by the *Financial Times*, the authoritative voice of British finance capital. It trumpeted in December 1978 that the PCE, “which controls the majority trade union confederation CC.OO and the best organized political party in Spain,” had been “crucial” during the Transition. “The active moderation showed by the communists ... was decisive in order to avoid that Spain fall into an abyss of civil conflict,” the FT concluded.

Socialist “transformations” were never on the agenda. Spain has had decades of high unemployment—over the last 40 years it has only once fallen below 10 percent, peaked at 27 percent in 2015 and remains at 15 percent (32 percent amongst youth). Since the 2008 global economic crash, years of austerity have seen a continuous fall in real wages, an explosion of temporary work contracts and the savaging of public services.

Today Spain is in a deep economic and political crisis, reflecting the breakdown of the post-World War II order. The two-party system that has dominated Spanish politics since the death of Franco is collapsing as a result.

In the last four years, there have been three general elections, two prime ministers, over 10 months under unstable interim governments and two budgets that have failed to pass parliament. As elsewhere in Europe, authoritarian police-state forms of rule are being prepared. Francoist ideology is openly manifesting itself again in the guise of the rising Vox party, which is

demanding major revisions of the Constitution to roll back regional autonomy, ban secessionist and Marxist parties and curtail the right to strike.

The trajectory of the PSOE has been to move further to the right. In 2010, Article 116, which deals with states of emergency, was used by the Zapatero PSOE government to put air traffic controllers under military discipline. The following year the PSOE, with the support of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), amended Article 135 to “ensure budgetary stability,” making the repayment of public debt a priority over social expenditure. This has provided the legal framework for EU-backed austerity. In 2017 Article 155 was used to suspend the elected regional government of Catalonia by PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy with the full support of the PSOE.

During its few months in power, the current Podemos-backed PSOE government under Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has proved indistinguishable from Rajoy’s. It has implemented austerity measures, showered the military with billions of euros, supported the US-led regime-change operations in Venezuela, intensified the crackdown on migrants and continued the repression of the Catalan nationalists. Sánchez said he would have no hesitation in using Article 155 again.

In the upcoming election it is expected that less than half of youth below 25 will vote and 41 percent of all voters are undecided. It is not clear if the PSOE, which is leading the polls at around 30 percent, will be able to rule again even with the votes of Podemos and the regional nationalists. There are fears in the PSOE of an “Andalusian scenario”—a reference to last December’s regional election when the PSOE, which had ruled the region for 38 years, lost power to the right-wing parties (the PP, Ciudadanos/Citizens and Vox) due to mass abstentions. Podemos has also seen its share of the vote slump and is riven with factional disputes, desertions and a collapse in membership. Former allies, the Stalinist-led United Left (IU) and regional nationalist parties, are distancing themselves from it.

The PSOE could ally with Ciudadanos, but until now its leader Albert Rivera has refused to make a deal with Sánchez.

It is unclear whether the right-wing parties combined can win enough votes to get a parliamentary majority.

There is talk, therefore, of Spain being without a government for months and the possibility of yet another election.

Polls indicate that social issues are of greatest concern to voters. The majority are worried about unemployment

(61 percent), followed by corruption and fraud (33 percent), political parties and politics (29 percent), economic problems (25 percent), and the public healthcare system (17 percent). Only 11 percent of the electorate are concerned about Catalan separatism, even though the issue has received saturation coverage in the media.

Growing layers of the population are coming into struggle. According to the Spanish Confederation of Business Organisations the hours of work lost due to strikes in Spain stood at 13,369,478 during the first quarter of the year, an increase of 163 percent from the same period in 2018. The number of workers involved—728,186—went up by 54 percent.

This rising militancy and social anger will encounter determined opposition in the ruling elite, whichever government is eventually cobbled together. Its response, as elsewhere in Europe, is to escalate the move towards a police state. The illusion being sown by Podemos that it can pressure the PSOE to “socialise” the Constitution therefore contains great dangers.

Podemos has shown that where it is in power in local government heading “municipalities of change” or “rebel councils,” it has enacted austerity. In the capital Madrid the Podemos-led Now Madrid (Ahora Madrid) coalition of Manuela Carmena gained power in 2015, ending 24 years of PP rule.

Two year later, Carmena announced cuts of around €173 million, prompting Iglesias to declare that “it is logical that the municipalities have to comply” and assuring everyone that Carmena would be the candidate for mayor again in the next election. (Carmena has since jettisoned Podemos and allied herself with Iglesias’ former number two, Íñigo Errejón.)

A new “Left” government, if it came to power, would impose pro-austerity and militarist policies indistinguishable from the right and strengthen the neo-fascists, who, while lacking a mass base, are receiving wide support within the state apparatus, the army, the Church and the media.

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