

Fascistic Vox party enters parliament in Spain elections, as social democrats gain

By Alex Lantier
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As votes were being tallied late last night in Spain's general elections, the pro-austerity Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) had taken first place with 123 seats. At the same time, however, the fascistic Vox party entered into the parliament—the first time a far-right party will sit in the Spanish Congress since 1978 and the end of the fascist regime created by Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

A hung parliament has again emerged, after similar results in 2015 and 2016, confirming the end of the post-Francoite two-party system between the PSOE and the right wing Popular Party (PP). No party has the 176-seat majority needed to form a governing majority in Spain's 350-seat parliament. After the PSOE's 123 seats, the right-wing PP, Citizens, and Vox won 66, 57 and 24 seats, respectively, while Unidas Podemos won 42.

The heavy voter turnout of over 75.7 percent rose 9 percentage points over the last elections and was the highest since 1982. The elections saw a collapse of the PP, which lost over half of the 137 seats it won in the 2016 elections, and for Podemos, which lost over a third of its 71 seats.

PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez appeared late last night to give a brief victory speech hailing the vote as the triumph over the “Spain of the past,” to a crowd outside PSOE headquarters chanting the anti-fascist slogan from the Spanish Civil War, “No pasaran” (“They shall not pass”). The PSOE had repeatedly warned during the campaign that the victory of the PP-Citizens-Vox alliance proposed by PP leader Pablo Casado would produce a far-right government in Spain. Sanchez's office frequently repeated the slogan, “If they add up, they will govern.”

It appears that the very heavy turnout reflected, at least in part, significant numbers of voters going to the

polls to vote for the PSOE so as to prevent the far right from coming to power. In Catalonia, where the PP organized a brutal crackdown with the support of the PSOE against the October 2017 Catalan independence referendum, voters stopped PP officials going to vote at the polls and told them that they were not welcome.

The strongest warnings must be made, however. Voting for the PSOE, or some related coalition of pro-capitalist parties, cannot in the final analysis block the rise of the far right or halt the social attacks raining down on the working class in Spain. On social cuts and militarism, the PSOE has a decades-long record of imposing European Union austerity and waging imperialist wars in Afghanistan and beyond.

The reactionary policies of the social democrats will not block the rise of the far right, which has continued to rise unabated under PSOE rule, in Spain any more than they have elsewhere in Europe. In France it was the Socialist Party (PS) that invited the neo-fascists to the Elysée presidential palace and normalized their role in French politics after the 2015 Paris terror attacks. In Germany, social-democratic officials sat in a Grand Coalition government whose ministers hailed neo-Nazi rallies during which Jewish businesses were attacked.

In Spain, as well, the policies of the social democrats did not block but reinforced the growing influence of the far right. While enjoying the support of Podemos, Sanchez's government has implemented austerity budgets, spent billions of euros on the army, and overseen the show trial of Catalan nationalist leaders on charges of rebellion for having organized the October 2017 Catalan independence referendum. PSOE officials including Sanchez have hailed PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's brutal police crackdown on peaceful voters during this referendum.

Under the PSOE, with its ceaseless promotion of

militarism and nationalism, together with its ongoing persecution of Catalan nationalist political prisoners, the ruling class created a reactionary political atmosphere which only strengthens Vox and hands it the political initiative. With only 24 seats, Vox nonetheless increasingly set the tone in official Spanish politics.

Vox officials held a brief, hysterical rally after the election results were announced, screaming nationalist slogans and denouncing former Catalan regional premier Carles Puigdemont, who organized the independence referendum, repeatedly shouting: “Puigdemont in prison!”

Whatever the political coloration of the forces the PSOE ultimately brings into it, the next government will step up attacks on the working class and create fertile ground for the further rise of the far right. The only way forward to fight the rise of Vox and similar far-right parties across Europe is to mobilize the working class across Europe in a political struggle against capitalism, including against the incoming Spanish government.

With a PP-Citizens-Vox coalition well short of the necessary 176-vote majority to form a government, the remaining possibilities that have been mooted are a PSOE-Citizens or the PSOE-Podemos-Catalan nationalist coalition. The right-wing Citizens party has repeatedly denounced the PSOE as a party of traitors for negotiating with the Catalan nationalists, and last night Citizens party leader Alberto Rivera ruled out a government coalition with the PSOE. “The bad news is that Sanchez and (Podemos general secretary Pablo) Iglesias will form a government,” Rivera said.

To boos from the crowd in front of him, Sanchez said he might still consider a coalition government with Citizens, an openly right wing party: “We will not act like them, they put up *cordons sanitaires* blocking off ties with the PSOE,” Sanchez said. “Based on our left-wing ideas and our progressive position, we will extend our hands to all the forces working within the constitution.”

Should Citizens continue to rebuff Sanchez’s overtures, it appears that, to form his government, Sanchez will likely again have to rely on the Catalan nationalists for support in Congress—even as he continues to try detained Catalan nationalist officials on trumped-up charges of rebellion. The

Catalan-nationalist Republican Left of Catalonia and Together for Catalonia won 15 and 7 seats, respectively; the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) won 6 seats. They have enough strength in the Spanish Congress to give a PSOE-Podemos coalition government a narrow majority.

Such an outcome would however cut across one of Sanchez’s main stated reasons for calling the elections: stabilizing his government. The elections were called in February by the minority PSOE government, which relied on Podemos and Catalan nationalists to give it a majority in parliament. The Sanchez government fell when the Catalan nationalist parties reacted to the PSOE’s reactionary show trial of their leading members by refusing to vote Sanchez’s budget. Should Sanchez again rely on the same forces, it appears that his government could again quite likely collapse.

As for Podemos, the election has exposed whatever few surviving pretensions it possessed of being a party for radical change. Instead, party general secretary Pablo Iglesias made clear last night after the elections that his energies were turned towards setting up a working parliamentary majority for the PSOE—the Spanish bourgeoisie’s preferred party of rule in the post-Francoite period.

“We would have liked to have obtained some better results, but they are sufficient for what we want to do,” said Iglesias. “The progressive forces add up to more than the right wing bloc, and Spain is unequivocally plurinational, as the election results in Catalonia and the Basque country show.” Iglesias added that he was pressuring Sanchez to open talks with Catalan and Basque nationalists: “I proposed initiating dialogue, and so far we’ve just left it at the stage of starting to talk.”

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