

The Spanish election crisis and the treachery of Podemos

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In Sunday's Spanish general elections, a dangerous pattern seen time and again in Europe is repeating itself. As with the National Front in France, the Freedom Party in Austria, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, and the Alternative for Germany, extreme-right parties are emerging as the main beneficiary of the disintegration of discredited social-democratic parties.

In Spain the fascistic Vox party, which had less than 1 percent of the vote and no parliamentarians last year, has risen to 15 percent and doubled its number of legislators, to 52, since the last elections in April. Its officials openly hail the 1936 coup and the resulting civil war and mass murder carried out by fascist dictator Francisco Franco, whose regime held power from 1939 to 1978. Despite broad opposition in the working class to Francoism, however, it is surging. How is this to be explained?

The major factor in the growth of the extreme right in Europe, as in the United States, is the growth of malignant levels of social inequality. In Spain, after the 2008 Wall Street crash, unemployment surged to a quarter of the workforce and half the youth, even as Spain's 26 billionaires amassed vast wealth. Growing anger at social inequality is the basic motive force driving mass protests in dozens of countries, including mass protests at police state repression of the Catalan independence referendum. Masses of workers and youth are striving to find a socialist alternative to capitalism.

Even amid growing popular opposition to capitalism and support for socialism, however, parties claiming to be "left" do not oppose capitalism. The empty and demagogic promises these pseudo-left organizations make disillusion and anger working people. There can be no clearer illustration of this than the response of Spain's "left populist" Podemos ("We can") party to the recent election.

Less than 48 hours after the election, Podemos leapt into a "pre-agreement" with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) to form a coalition government. The PSOE and Podemos are seeking further coalition partners among Catalan or Basque nationalist parties, to form a parliamentary majority for what various media outlets call a "progressive" or even a "far left" government. However, the PSOE-Podemos "pre-agreement" commits them to European Union (EU) austerity and continuing the PSOE's military spending increases and its police crackdown to impose "social peace" in Catalonia.

This morning, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias published an open letter, ostensibly addressed to the Podemos membership, announcing that Podemos will implement right-wing policies. He wrote, "The right-wing parties and media representatives of corporate power will hit us very hard, each step we take. We will be a minority in a government with the PSOE in which we will face many limits and contradictions, and we will have to give up on many things."

Podemos is thus creating conditions for Vox to continue to grow, by posturing as the only opposition to the anti-worker policies of the political establishment.

Podemos, like its first cousin the Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left") government in Greece, is based on fraudulent theories of "left populism" that reject the working class, class struggle, socialism, and revolutionary policies. Chantal Mouffe, the postmodernist writer and associate of leading members of the Syriza and Podemos parties, has laid these arguments out quite explicitly.

In her pamphlet *For a Left Populism* published last year, Mouffe declares: "What is urgently needed is a left populist strategy aimed at the construction of a 'people,' combining the variety of democratic

resistances against post-democracy in order to establish a more democratic hegemonic formation. ... I contend that it does not require a 'revolutionary' break with the liberal democratic regime."

Even as Mouffe's book appeared, her political charlatanism had been exposed by the Syriza government's record. While Syriza promised voters to end EU austerity, it rejected revolutionary measures and an appeal to European workers for support against the EU; its "more democratic hegemonic formation," was a government coalition formed in 2015 with the far-right Independent Greeks. In the end, Syriza utterly betrayed its election promises, imposing tens of billions in EU social cuts and imprisoning tens of thousands of refugees in detention camps in the Greek islands.

After the Syriza disaster, it is the turn of Podemos to help the PSOE assemble a "more democratic hegemonic formation." Such a coalition would prove as hostile to workers in Spain as in Greece. Since it negotiated with the fascist Francoite regime a Transition to parliamentary rule in 1978, the PSOE has been the bourgeoisie's principal instrument to impose EU austerity and wage imperialist wars, from Afghanistan to Libya. Podemos is now endorsing the reactionary policies the PSOE will pursue.

It would be worse than useless to appeal to the affluent university professors, state officials, army officers and union bureaucracy making up Podemos to pursue a less regressive policy. Podemos is opposed to any initiative by the working class that would in any way impinge on the wealth, property and material interests of its affluent middle class base. Mouffe's fraudulent theory of "left populism" seeks to provide theoretical legitimacy to the reactionary anti-socialist and pro-capitalist program of organizations like Podemos and Syriza.

Mouffe's "left-populism" reeks of intellectual charlatanism and political cynicism. She writes, "It is to be expected that this left populist strategy will be denounced by the sectors of the left who keep reducing politics to the contradiction of capital/labor and attribute an ontological privilege to the working class, presented as the vehicle for socialist revolution. They will of course see this as a capitulation to 'bourgeois ideology.' There is no point answering these criticisms, that proceed from the very conception of politics against which I have been arguing."

The fascist resurgence has exposed the bankruptcy of the pseudo-left. Its defense of capitalism and rejection of any policy that impinges the prerogatives of bourgeois property and wealth precludes any appeal to the working class. The role being played by Podemos essentially duplicates the treacherous role played by Stalinists and social democrats in the Spain of the 1930s. Their alliance with a section of the Spanish bourgeoisie in what was called a Popular Front ruled out revolutionary policies in the fight against General Franco and his fascist allies. The result was the crushing of the socialist revolution and Franco's victory.

The lessons of the 1930s must be learned. The fight against fascism today requires an assault by the working class on capitalist property, aimed at the expropriation of the financial aristocracy.

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