Corbyn's New Party Risks Labour's Fatal Mistake – Why "Your Party" Needs Independent Wings, Not Branch Offices

Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana's newly announced "Your Party" is already raising concerns among Scottish left activists who warn the venture could collapse before it starts if it continues ignoring the national question. The harsh reality? Scotland's left has watched this movie before – and it always ends in failure.

Bella Caledonia sums it up: "Limited consideration of Scotland has taken place in this attempt to get a left of Labour electoral challenge up and running," observes Democratic Left Scotland, while Richie Venton of the Scottish Socialist Party warns that "any new party that seeks to operate in Scotland must respect the right of the Scottish people to self-determination and must not be a mere branch office of a London-centric project.

This isn't just Scottish sensitivity – it's strategic necessity. The historical record is unforgiving: centralized left parties that ignore national questions don't just fail in Scotland, they fragment entirely. Spain's catastrophic left retreat in the 1990s offers a perfect case study of what happens when socialists dismiss plurinational realities.

The Spanish Warning: How Centralism Destroyed the Left

The Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE) once dominated the left. The left magazine Viento Sur describes its failures. By the 1990s, it had become a "neoliberal force with progressive

trappings," transforming into what critics called a "party-cartel" that monopolized politics through state financing while abandoning its working-class identity. But PSOE's fatal error wasn't just embracing neoliberalism – it was promoting a divisive "theory of two national communities" that alienated Catalonia, the Basque Country, and Galicia.

In the Basque Country, PSOE manufactured a false division between communities, casting Basques as "bourgeois and racist" nationalists opposed to "working-class, socialist, and universalist" speakers of Castilian Spanish. This strategy poisoned dialogue and drove communities apart. This wasn't just bad politics – it was organizational suicide.

Izquierda Unida (IU), formed as a left alternative to PSOE, repeated the same mistakes. Despite its anti-capitalist rhetoric, IU struggled with a chronic inability to accept the plurinational reality of the Spanish state. Strong centralist currents within IU viewed national demands as "sectarian" or "right-wing," fatally undermining the party's ability to build genuine grassroots support in the Basque Country, Catalonia and Galicia.

The results were devastating. In Galicia, the rise of the Bloque Nacionalista Galego (BNG) captured the "vote of discontent" while IU's components struggled to reach even 3% of the vote. The lesson couldn't be clearer: Spain's alternative left faces a binary choice: **either** genuinely champion the distinct national identities and self-determination rights of its regions, **or** accept political marginalization and eventual collapse.

Scotland's Clear Message: Autonomy Works, Branch Offices Don't

Scottish left parties have learned this lesson the hard way. The most successful examples – the Scottish Socialist Party and Scottish Greens – operate as genuinely independent entities, not subordinate branches of UK-wide organizations.

The Scottish Greens emerged in 1990 when the former UK Green Party deliberately separated into two independent parties. Today, they're completely separate and unique with their own leaders, membership, and policies. Their strong support for Scottish independence isn't incidental – it's integral to their identity and success.

Similarly, the Scottish Socialist Party formed in 1998 from the Scottish Socialist Alliance, explicitly as a distinct Scottish entity. The SSP unequivocally supports independence, framing it through "internationalist rather than nationalist concerns" and advocating for a "Scottish socialist republic."

Contrast this with parties that maintained centralized structures. The Respect Party, "established in London" with no distinct Scottish presence, made virtually no impact north of the border and even lost supporters in England who opposed its organising north of the border. The pattern is clear: Scottish voters reject "branch office" politics.

Ross Greer, the Scottish Green MSP, put it bluntly: "The idea of a new London-based party trying to establish a 'branch office' in Scotland without a clear understanding of our distinct political context is deeply concerning."

Why "Your Party" Risks Disaster

Troubling early indicators suggest "Your Party" risks repeating these historical errors. Scottish commentators describe the initial launch as "badly bungled and incoherent," with conflicting reports about organizational structure and minimal Scottish input.

Helena from 'No Justice' captures the frustration: Rolling out "Jeremy Corbyn as a 'left-leader' and harking back (uncritically) to how wonderful he was" isn't "serious politics." The party risks being dismissed as nostalgic English leftism that ignores Scottish political realities.

Most critically, “Your Party” has yet to clarify its position on Scottish self-determination—a silence that Scottish activists are already interpreting as indifference.. This isn’t a minor oversight – it’s a deal-breaker for many. As Ross Greer notes, “Scotland needs a strong, independent voice on the left, not another Westminster-controlled outfit.”

The electoral arithmetic is brutal. Connor Beaton warns that attempting to contest Holyrood elections without broad engagement could “end up like RISE in 2016, winning a derisory share of the vote which then contributes to the whole project’s collapse.”

The Platform for Socialism and Independence

The good news is that Scottish socialists are already organizing to prevent this disaster. The recently launched Platform for Socialism and Independence brings together Aberdeen Marxist Caucus, the Republican Socialist Platform, Scottish Socialist Youth, and Socialists for Independence. It represents exactly the kind of proactive intervention needed. Rather than waiting for “Your Party” to impose a structure from London, these groups are engaging strategically while maintaining core principles around independence and Scottish autonomy.

The Path Forward: Embrace Plurinationalism

Jamie Driscoll, involved in “Your Party’s” formation, seems to understand the stakes, emphasizing “significant autonomy in the nations and regions” and rejecting a “top-down London-run party.” But good intentions aren’t enough – organizational structure matters.

Based on successful precedents, “Your Party” needs to:

- **Unequivocally support Scottish self-determination**– not as a tactical position, but as a foundational principle. The Spanish experience shows that half-measures create

"artificial barriers of incommunication."

- **Foster genuine autonomy**– Scottish and Welsh wings must have their own leadership, decision-making structures, and tailored political programmes. The Scottish Greens' model of formal separation or the SSP's autonomous development offer proven templates.
- **Build grassroots power first**– Instead of immediate Holyrood campaigns, focus on local organizing and council elections in 2027. This allows time to develop genuine Scottish leadership and avoid the "excessive politicismo" that doomed Spain's IU.
- **Engage existing Scottish movements**– Work with independence campaigns, climate justice groups, Palestine solidarity, and other progressive forces rather than competing with them.

Learning from Failure in the Spanish State

The Spanish left's 1990s retreat wasn't inevitable – it resulted from strategic choices that prioritized institutional power over grassroots organizing and centralized control over plurinational democracy. These same pressures exist today.

"Your Party" can succeed, but only if it learns from these failures. The choice is stark: embrace genuine autonomy for Scotland and Wales, or watch another promising left initiative fragment on the rocks of unresolved national questions.

The Scottish left has been clear about what it needs. The question is whether Corbyn and Sultana are listening – or whether they're destined to repeat the mistakes that have buried left parties across Europe.

As Richie Venton warns: "We've seen countless attempts to build left-wing unity in Scotland only to see them fail because of a lack of understanding of the Scottish political landscape and the need for a genuinely independent Scottish socialist movement."

This is “Your Party’s” moment of truth. The early warning signs are flashing red, but the fatal mistakes haven’t been locked in yet. Corbyn and Sultana can still demonstrate they understand what every successful Scottish left party has learned: revolutionary democracy means unequivocally supporting self-determination. The choice is stark—act now to embrace genuine Scottish autonomy, or watch another promising left initiative fragment on familiar rocks.

Reposted from Red Mole Substack

Anti-Fascists Demand Freedom for Zaragoza Six

Jennifer Debs writes for Heckle.Scot about the campaign to free anti-fascist activists in the Spanish state.

If the Scottish independence movement has a sense of internationalism, then events in that blob of disgruntled nations called ‘Spain’ tend to loom largest in our minds. *Heckle* readers are aware, I’m sure, of how the cause of Catalunya is eagerly identified with the cause of Scotland – one need only attend any independence march to see that evidenced in the Catalan colours among the mass of flags. In a way, this is a kind of Scottish modification of the traditional “philo-hispanism” of the left, our movement’s continuing identification with the history of the Spanish Republic, the international brigades, workers’ power in Barcelona, and the long clandestine struggle against Franco and his regime.

Even so, for all our sympathy with the brave crowds who confronted the Guardia Civil during the 2017 Catalan referendum, our support for persecuted pro-independence politicians, and our disgust at the zombie Francoism of the Spanish government, there are some urgent causes from the peninsula that could do with greater awareness among Scottish workers. Take the case of the Zaragoza Six, a group of anti-fascist activists arrested and imprisoned on trumped-up charges after a protest against the far-right Vox party in 2019.

Just for taking to the streets to oppose the rising threat of fascism in the Spanish state, the Zaragoza Six are facing prison sentences. Theirs has been a years-long battle for freedom since the initial arrests, a story of trials, verdicts, appeals, and yet more trials, with three of the group now having entered prison as of April 16th, and one more set to enter prison on April 24th. These four comrades will each be serving a sentence of four years and nine months, and that on top of heavy fines.

As anti-fascists facing punishment, the cause of the Z6 demands the enthusiastic support of the Scottish left. Not only have we witnessed fascist political organisations making a comeback in the anti-refugee protests at Erskine, but far-right public order and culture war politics lead the way in the Conservative Party, with the government taking aim at refugees, climate protesters, striking workers, Palestine activists and transgender people. The danger is in the streets, but also in the halls of government. The Spanish context, with the role played by both Vox and by state repression, therefore warrants our close attention – our national situations are two facets of a wider phenomenon.



In order to find out more, I reached out to the Z6 campaign to see if I could interview anyone and bring their story to an audience over here. They were happy to speak to *Heckle*, and so Javitxu Aijon, one of the Six, got in touch with me to speak over a video call. My discussion with Javitxu took place when he was still free, but I am sad to say that as you are reading this now, he is behind bars.

I began by asking Javitxu who the Zaragoza Six are, and about their case. Essentially, Javitxu said, they are just six people who were arrested following a demonstration against a meeting of the far-right Vox party at Zaragoza's auditorium on 17th January 2019. Just one month prior to the demo, Vox had entered the Andalusian parliament, "so there was a popular impression of the rise of the far right, and the danger of that- machismo, racism, xenophobia," Javitxu explained. "In that protest there were a lot of people who weren't in formal political movements," he continued, including himself among their number. Javtixu said he had previously been in the Podemos party in 2018, and had left-wing views, but that he wasn't really organised at that point. In all, 200 young anti-fascists protested against Vox on the 17th, facing violent attacks from the police in the process.

After the demonstration was over, six young people, four adults and two minors, all of them under 24 years of age, were arrested at random in the surrounding area. The police made their choices based on the look of their targets' clothing – indeed, one of the six did not even attend the anti-Vox protest. Four of the six, Javitxu alongside them, were detained when police entered a bar close to the site of the demonstration. In Javitxu's case, he simply saw a minor being arrested in the bar, and when he tried to point this out to the police officer and tell him to be careful, he was grabbed and detained too. He asked the officers why he was being arrested, but didn't get much of a response: "Their only answer was that I was in the protest, so maybe I had done something." This was an arrest on pure suspicion, on assumed guilt.

And the crimes for which this haphazard bunch of arrestees, one of whom wasn't even present at a protest, stood accused? Public disorder, and assaulting a police officer. These were the charges on which the Z6 faced trial in the Provincial Court of Zaragoza, with a sentence of six years in prison for the four adults, one year of probation for the two minors, and a fine of €11,000 being handed down in January 2021. This conviction was, however, based on the sole evidence of the testimony of the police officers, with witnesses and evidence that could prove the innocence of the Z6 being ignored. Crucially, security footage caught by University of Zaragoza CCTV cameras shows the violence at the protest, but the footage does not show any of the Z6 involved in fights with the police at any point. However, this footage was not admitted as evidence by the judge.

Following the initial judgment, the sentence was then increased by the High Court of Justice of Aragon to seven years for the four adults in October 2021. Javitxu explained that a sentence of this length for anti-fascist activism is unheard of; typically, arrested anti-fascists receive

sentences of two or three years. The Z6 appealed this decision to the supreme court, and the appeal process dragged on with no decision until this year, when the supreme court finally decided on the aforementioned sentence of four years and nine months, plus fines. Even if the jail-time has been reduced, the fact that innocent anti-fascists are being imprisoned at all is a tremendous blow to the left, and a victory for both the far right and the repressive apparatus of the state.

“Francoism never went away. There is no real democracy in Spain.”

Beyond the police narrative of events, I wanted to get Javitxu’s perspective on the reasons for the arrests and the sentences, and to discuss the significance of the criminalisation of his and his co-defendants’ political activity. In Javitxu’s opinion, “they want us in jail because we have a problem with police hierarchy and far-right movements. They are linked.” Indeed, Javitxu contends that the police are very close to far-right movements in the Spanish state. Furthermore, he feels that the Z6 have been hit with such heavy jail-time specifically to send a message to other protest movements. Javitxu pointed out that the protest in 2019 was the first anti-fascist protest he had seen in Zaragoza with new people who weren’t just part of the pre-existing movements of the left, fresh people who saw a danger in far-right ideas – and of course, fresh layers of society taking part in protests is dangerous to the status quo, dangerous to the capitalist state. Adding to this, Javitxu outlined a repressive wave in motion throughout the Spanish state in recent years, with the arrest of the Catalan rapper Pablo Hasel for criticism of the monarchy serving as a prime example.

Javitxu dates this repressive wave from late 2017 and the

state backlash against Catalan independence referendum. He argues that the Spanish government is afraid of the number of people who took to the streets to fight for Catalan independence, and that it wants to try and clamp down on future mass movements. In the context of this, abnormally harsh sentences for protesters opposing the far right appear as a weapon for dispersing and defusing a protest movement before it can cohere. Indeed, when I spoke of the courts as a capitalist class weapon, Javitxu agreed with me. “Francoism never went away. There is no real democracy in Spain.”



The situation now is bleak. This means that the question of how the movement fights back against the convictions is crucial, so I naturally wanted to know what Javitxu thought about the issue. His answer was keeping up pressure, continuing the fight: “If you want to stop the repressive machine in, for example, the housing movement, and the bank are going to throw you out of your house, then there must be a movement to avoid the eviction. So if you want to end the repression of this movement, you need to stop more evictions. If you want to stop the repression of the workers’ movement, you need to strike more, protest more.”

For Javitxu, there is no solid border between the struggle in the courts and in the streets – indeed, for him the question of liberty is a political one, which requires an organised

response. “I think if you want to fight back against repression, you need more of a political movement.” He pointed to the example of the Z6 solidarity campaign so far, which has gathered the support of the political parties, trade unions and movements of the left, as well as musicians and actors, and which has continued to protest and agitate for a total amnesty.

Of course, with the dire turn events have taken, the need for a political support campaign has only deepened, as has the necessity of internationalising the campaign and getting support from workers’ and popular movements across the world. If pressure can be brought to bear on the Spanish government on multiple fronts, it will be to the benefit of the Z6.

The question of the movement’s response naturally entails another: What next for the anti-fascist movement in the Spanish state? Javitxu felt that the main problem of anti-fascism currently is that “there are not enough people involved. The anti-fascist movement needs to do more to influence popular opinion.” He also pointed out a problem with how the anti-fascist movement has traditionally operated: “I think there are people that still think the far right are just skinhead Nazis who are in the streets with knives and so on. It’s really different, the way the far right are organising themselves right now. There are Nazis with a skinhead aesthetic, but they are not the majority of the far-right movement right now. They are not the imminent danger. Vox for example, I think there is a difference in how they do politics.”

Javitxu pointed out that while Vox might hate groups like LGBT people and immigrants, the party is much more careful in how it expresses its ideas about these groups. It does not call for violence openly in the way a neo-Nazi gang would, but rather Vox seeks to influence and sway public opinion, to bring in parts of the traditional conservative voter base. In Javitxu’s view, the anti-fascist movement needs to find a way

to combat this more “official” form of fascism. This dilemma is reminiscent of our own situation here in Scotland and the wider UK, where our anti-fascists may be able to outnumber and kick the fascists out of towns and cities on a good day, but where far-right ideas spur government policy regardless and receive silence, or even approval, from the Labour Party.

I ended our call by asking what the Scottish workers’ movement can do to support the Z6. Javitxu felt that the best way for people in Scotland to support the Z6 is, first and foremost, to spread the word: “It’s really important at the moment for this to be known about.” The campaign for an amnesty for the prisoners will be continuing, so Scottish workers need to keep up to date and show solidarity where they can. If you can bring up the cause of the Z6 in your trade union and organisational branch meetings and encourage them to contact the campaign and get involved, then please do so. And of course, there is currently a fundraiser to cover both the fines and the legal costs of the Z6 case. Please donate if you can, and spread it in your groups and networks.

Javitxu also wanted to underline to my readers that “if they know someone who is in some kind of trial, not to let him or her fight this alone. The most important support they can give to any victim of repression is emotional support.” We have cases here in Scotland that are in need of this kind of comradeship, like the Starmer Two, a pair of Palestine protesters arrested for demonstrating against Keir Starmer in December last year. Comrades bearing the brunt of police repression could always use a friend and a helping hand.

When we raise the call of freedom for the Zaragoza Six, the old struggles live anew in our words. We remember the names of friends and martyrs, class war prisoners old and new: John Maclean, Nicola Sacco, Bartolomeo Vanzetti, George Jackson, Angela Davis, Abdullah Öcalan. We remember the love, hope, rage and solidarity that fired, and fires, hearts in streets all across the world in cause of their liberty. And we fondly

recall the words of the great American socialist Eugene Debs, another victim of capitalist persecution, who said: “While there is a lower class I am of it, while there is a criminal class I am of it, while there is a soul in prison I am not free.”

As for Javitxu himself, he remains defiant. Throughout our conversation he was adamant that he will continue to participate in anti-repression movements, and that his experience with the courts has only made him firmer in his resolve. He wants to show others what the judicial system does to people, and to express himself to others who are facing repression from the state.

“I had passed from a lot of states of depression because of this. I think that these are thoughts that are normal. After the second trial, I really wanted to abandon social movements, to go away, to disappear. And it’s this that they want. They want us to surrender, give up, and not to fight for a better world, a better situation for our comrades, friends, family. I think if someone is living this kind of thing, like trials for fighting for a better world, maybe, maybe, they are on the right side of history. I did nothing wrong, my conscience is peaceful. For now, I have no problems. If I go to jail, it will be years to study politics, to form myself, to be a better militant for the movement, to change this shit, this judicial system, this political system.”

All that remains to be said is that Javitxu Aijon and the Zaragoza Six are comrades in need. They deserve our support and assistance.

For them, for all political prisoners – tenacity, courage and fury!

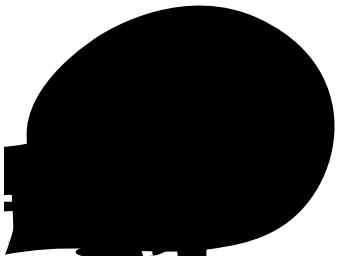
Free the Zaragoza Six!

You can keep in touch with the Z6 campaign at these links:

- Fundraiser campaign for the Z6.
- Campaign email address: contacto@libertad6dezaragoza.info
- The campaign's website has a manifesto with a section for signatures from supporters at the bottom of the page.

Originally published at: https://heckle.scot/2024/04/anti-fascists-demand-freedom-for-zaragoza-six/

Heckle is an 0nline Scottish publication overseen by a seven-person editorial board elected by members of the Republican Socialist Platform.



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Photos from Heckle.Scot

Hard Right Fails To Make

Breakthrough in Spanish State Election

*Dave Kellaway writes for Anti*Capitalist Resistance on the general election in the Spanish state.*

On Spanish TV on Sunday night, you had the rather bizarre spectacle of both major parties claiming victory.

The conservative People's Party (PP) did become the largest single party but was 40 seats shy of a governing majority on its own. It is 7 seats short of a working coalition if it allied with the neo-fascist Vox (Voice). It had already done so in a number of regional parliaments after its clear victory in the May local and regional elections. Its leader, Feijoo, is proclaiming his right to try to form a government as the largest single party and denouncing attempts to stop him as blocking democracy. But he does not have the numbers and in politics that is what counts. It is unlikely that he can put together a coalition with Vox, which has called for the banning of nationalist parties, while at the same time bringing on board pro-independence parties in the Basque country.

Spanish State General Election Results, July 23, 2023

Party	% vote	seats	2019 %	2019 seats
PP (conservative)	33.1	136	20.8	89
PSOE (social liberal)	31,7	122	28.0	120
Vox (post/neo fascist)	12.4	33	15.1	52
Sumar (radical left coalition includes Unido Podemos, Compromis, Mas Pais etc)	12.3	31	12.9 (only Unido Podemos)	35 (=same parties as in Sumar now)
ERC (Catalan nationalist)	1.9	7	3.6	13

Junts((Catalan nationalist)	1.6	7	2.1	8
EH Bildu (Basque Nationalist left)	1.4	6	1.1	5
PNV (Basque Nationalist mainstream)	1.2	5	1.6	6

You need 176 seats to form a government.

On the other side, Sanchez, the leader of the social liberal PSOE (Socialist Workers Party), was exultant in his post-election speech. His party had won a million more votes than in the last general election in 2019 and two more seats. Opinion polls had predicted a significantly larger (+3% more) gap between the PSOE and the PP. The PP had centred their campaign on burying Sanchismo, organising a cultural war on his party's measures in favour of trans, gays, and women. The rise of Vox to its right has meant it has adopted some of its reactionary policies.

Sanchez had gambled by calling this early election; he could have waited until later in the year. A defeat could have meant a challenge to his leadership. Undoubtedly, the strident calls to block the Francoist revanchists of Vox helped mobilise a significant part of the PSOE base. He has indicated that he will look to re-establish his coalition government. Already, he benefits from the support of some Basque and Catalan nationalists. The PSOE really needs to get at least the abstention of the Junts Catalan nationalists. Despite losing a seat and seeing the PSC (PSOE in Catalonia) and Sumar do well in Catalonia, Junts could now have a kingmaker role. Their leader, Puigdemont, has been persecuted by the Spanish state for his role in organising the unauthorised independence referendum in 2017. He is in exile in Belgium. The leader of Junts has already said they will not provide their support to Sanchez without something in exchange.

Yolanda Diaz, the leader of Sumar (Come Together), the new

radical left coalition set up by her without the initial support of her Unidos Podemos leadership comrades, was also happy with the results. Sumar had just failed in its bid to beat Vox into third place and won fewer votes and seats than these components achieved in 2019, but it was a solid result that gives the formation some leverage in forming future coalitions with the PSOE. Yolanda claimed credit for helping to push back the neo-fascists, and certainly her campaign did mobilise around that issue.

Sumar, nevertheless, is far from the same political current that Podemos was at its height following the explosion of the 15M Indignados (angry ones) movement in 2011. Then there was a link between the new political current and a new, vibrant movement in the communities. Podemos wanted to replace the PSOE, not become its left satellite and coalition partner. In the 2016 general election, it was a point or so behind the PSOE at 21%. It argued then for a ‘rupture’ with the post-Franco regime established in 1978. Podemos was sympathetic to a radical new deal for the nations within the Spanish state and was anti-monarchy. Yolanda Diaz created Sumar as a further moderate iteration of a Podemos that had already moved right by becoming a coalition partner and taking ministerial posts. It represents the integration of the left of the PSOE into the institutions. Mobilising against Vox was important, but the anti-fascist campaign also helped to drown out any critical balance sheet of the real character of the PSOE/Sumar coalition. Some commentators on the left in Britain have tended to leave out this analysis.

During this election, Sumar put forward some more radical proposals than Sanchez, such as a large ‘inheritance’ grant of 20,000 euros for each 18-year-old. Such a measure looks positive, but it places redistribution within an individualist framework that does not particularly challenge capitalist society. The money does not alter in any way how resources are produced and distributed, unlike measures that take industries

or utilities into common ownership. The left would not necessarily oppose such a measure; it involves some redistribution, clearly, but like universal basic income, it is a measure that the bosses can live with, and it even stimulates capitalist consumption.

Pushing back the neo-fascist Vox (which lost 3% of its votes but nearly half its seats) was a positive outcome of this election. It demonstrates that advancing fascism is combatable and that the hard right's takeover of Europe is not an inevitable process. Unlike Starmer, Sanchez vigorously defended his progressive legislation against the PP/Vox cultural wars, demonstrating that you do not have to give ground on these issues. For example, in its Valencian stronghold, Naquera, where it had banned the LBGTQ+ flags, it lost the majority it had won in the local elections.

However, Vox will continue to govern in coalition in a number of regions, and its base has been consolidated. The impact its reactionary policies have had on a resurgent PP is another way to measure its political success. The latter, despite failing to get a majority, is now the largest party and has mopped up practically all the electoral support that the neo-liberal centrist party, Cuidadanos, formerly enjoyed.

Today, Sanchez is looking to knit together a new coalition. One problem is that all the small nationalist parties *(See: *Note)* that facilitated his previous investiture have lost seats except EH Bildu, the more left wing of the Basque parties. He really needs Puigdemont's Junts to come onside, but Sanchez is wary of conceding too much to a leader that he has done nothing to free from exile in Belgium. Junts are demanding an amnesty for Catalan political prisoners and a referendum. It is not in a rush to deal with Sanchez, and they say they are unperturbed by a stalemate situation (El Diario, July 25). Already, there have been more Spanish general elections in recent times than elsewhere in Europe, and we could be heading for another one in a few months if no

agreement is made.

The PP is desperately claiming some legitimate right to form a government as the largest party. After making a whole campaign around smashing Sanchismo, it is now asking the PSOE to allow it to govern. Apart from Vox, it is seeking the support of the moderate Basque PNV party, the Canary Coalition, and the UPN, a conservative party in Navarra. Sources suggest the numbers do not add up since the PNV has already said no. There may be some recriminations in the PP ranks over whether the alliance with Vox in regional governments had a negative effect on the general election.

The likely scenario is a new Sanchez-led coalition, which will be weaker given the surge in PP support, or new elections. Sanchez stated today that he is confident of rebuilding his coalition and that there will be no new elections. Feijoo's PP and Vox will focus on Sanchez's greater dependence on nationalist parties in order to mobilise conservative popular opposition to any new coalition. Despite Sanchez's reassurances, there could be greater political instability.

This election has confirmed a return to more of a two-party system, with the PP and PSOE taking 65% of the vote. It had fallen below 50% at one stage with the emergence of Podemos and Cuidadanos. It will be interesting to see how Sumar develops. Will it be able to consolidate its disparate forces into a coherent political current? Will there be democratic internal structures—currently it is organised in a top-down way through apparatus-to-apparatus discussions mediated by the personality of Yolanda Diaz? Will there be pressure for some of its forces to be absorbed by the PSOE? Can Sumar be a party or movement where revolutionary socialists can organise, as was the case with Podemos for some time?

For people suffering from the cost of living crisis, poor or expensive housing, and deteriorating public services, the PSOE/Sumar government has not altered a great deal apart from

some tweaks in the labour laws and progressive reforms on gender rights or on the historical truth about the Civil War. Abstention remains at 34%, which confirms the trend of recent years where many working people are alienated from the political system. The new situation, which is very polarised on the institutional level, is unlikely to change this. Building self-organisation outside of institutions to defend living standards and make social gains remains a key priority. The unions have been pretty much integrated into the government's reformism without reforms. Recapturing the dynamic of the Indignados movement and the political radicalism of the early Podemos current is more important than ever.

26 July 2023

Republished from Anti*Capitalist Resistance: https://anticapitalistresistance.org/hard-right-fails-to-make-breakthrough-in-spanish-election/

**Note: The Catalan left wing anticapitalist group Popular Unity Candidacy (Catalan: Candidatura d'Unitat Popular, CUP) lost votes and its two seats in the Cortes, while the Republican Left of Catalonia (Catalan: Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, ERC), aligned with the SNP, lost 6 seats and fell to 7 seats, its lowest number of seats since 2011. The gainer in Catalonia was the PSC, the name the PSOE adopts in Catalonia. However, the left wing Galician Nationalist Bloc (Galician: Bloque Nacionalista Galego, BNG) increased its vote share and held on to its single seat and, as the article explains, the more left wing of the Basque independentist parties EH Bildu (Euskal Herria Bildu – English: Basque Country Gather or Basque Country Unite) gained 1 seat. [Note from ecosocialist.scot editors]*

Anticapitalistas (Spanish State) – Statement on the General Election to be held on Sun 23rd July

*Dave Kellaway of Anti*Capitalist Resistance translates the Anticapitalistas (Spanish State) statement on the upcoming general election (Sun 23 July).*

The rise of reactionary political currents in the Spanish state is significant for the July 23 general election. This growth in political reaction is a global trend. The immediate factor behind this snap election was the electoral defeat of the progressive bloc in the May 28 regional and local elections, which changed the political situation. Although the results were relatively close between the PP (People's Party, the mainstream conservatives) and the PSOE (Socialist Workers Party, the traditional social democrats), the electoral arithmetic has generated a major shift. We saw the resounding collapse of Unidas Podemos (groups to the left of the PSOE but in full coalition government with it) and the decline of the PSOE, which led the PP to win many provincial capitals and Autonomous Regions. This changed the political cycle and led Pedro Sánchez to call a general election.

The reactionary turn in the situation has underlying causes. The first and most decisive is to be found at the international level, in a succession of defeats and capitulations of the left that emerged after the 2008 crisis and which have provoked the rise of a new right: from Syriza in Greece to the integration of Podemos into a government with

the PSOE, passing through Corbynism or Sanders. The feeling that remains is that the left is not capable of consolidating stable mass projects or putting forward a programme that it can implement. So the crisis within the left is the first cause.

Another underlying reason has to do with fear: war, the geopolitical reordering of capitalism, and the ecological crisis generate a sense of the end of an epoch. Inequality is increasing in the countries of the capitalist centre; whole areas of the world are being thrown into chaos by capitalism; and new powers are disputing hegemony with the old ones. It is clear to the middle classes: law and order must be imposed within each country in order to be in a better position to maintain relative privileges in a world in flames. The working class and the oppressed lack strong political organisations and do not have a strategic perspective to fight capitalism. But the rebellions continue, albeit without clear political direction: France took over from Chile, Chile from the black people in the USA… and so on and so forth.

In Spain, the transformation of Podemos into a more institutionally integrated and less radical force and the defeat of the pro-independence cycle have been the determining factors within the progressive bloc. The emergence of VOX (the voice of hard-right post-fascists) and the rise of the PP are the reverse of this pendulum. The progressive coalition government formed in 2018 was not the beginning of a period of great change. It was rather the end of the hope that 15M had opened up. [15th May is the name given to the Indignados movement, huge street mobilisations, and radicalisation that erupted in 2011 and led to the creation of the radical left Podemos-Tr] The progressive government has tried to promote a policy of modernisation of Spanish capitalism, which we have described as “reformist without reforms” Far from seeking a recomposition of capitalist society on the basis of a certain redistribution of wealth, they have maintained at all costs a

policy that preserved corporate profits in a context of “Keynesianism without growth or redistribution”. Related to this policy, which reflects and feeds the current dynamics of capitalism, military spending is brutally increased, the pro-security reinforcement of the state is promoted, the terrain of protest is created, territorial autonomy is defended, and migrants are attacked.

In this sense, despite the big speeches, the progressive government has not fulfilled its promises in terms of legislation on labour reform, pensions, the gag law, housing, etc. It has objectively implemented a reinforcement of the authoritarian drift of the state on migration; it has aligned itself with Western imperialism, where it plays a subordinate role (Sahara, the war in Ukraine, etc.). The government has applied the economic policy of capital: inflation has eaten into wages, and the working class is no stronger socially than when this legislature began. The great historic task of tackling the climate crisis has been postponed and handed over to big business, thus promoting ‘green capitalism’. Even in areas where certain advances have been made, such as feminism and LGBTI rights, these are fragile and threatened, among other things, by the co-option and institutionalisation of social movements.

The rise of the right in the Spanish state is part of this context: insecurity about the future, hegemony of the old middle classes in the political field, reaction against the processes of social mobilisation of recent years. In a distorted way, this right has been moulded by its reaction to the progressive bloc. It feeds off the chronic crisis, the need to preserve order because change can only be imagined to be worse, and the structural weakening of workers’ organisational capacity. The underlying negative process inexorably advances while progressivism suffers and agonises as it “manages the existing situation”.

We do not want a single vote to go to the right. We do not

want the Popular Party and VOX to get into government. But, beyond the individual vote of each one, we cannot close our eyes to the left parties' politics of renunciation, which have already demonstrated in government that they are incapable of fulfilling their promises and of confronting the economic powers in order to defend the interests of the working class. Where they exist, we call on voters to vote for candidates who express a clear position against the reactionary wave but also a rejection of capitulations and alliances with social liberalism and who defend freedom and self-determination. So we call for a vote for the CUP (a Catalan left independence current). This is despite our differences with them regarding their overly complacent policy with the rest of the pro-independence bloc and on more strategic issues. We will also vote and build Adelante Andalucía (Forward Andalucia), which aims to build an ecosocialist and feminist current among Andalusian workers against the regime of 78 (the government that led the compromised and moderate transition from Francoism to Tr). It will highlight the secular oppression suffered by this territory.

On the 23rd of July, we will know what the new political framework is in which we will have to operate. If progressivism resists, the onslaught of the right will not cease, and we have no confidence that the necessary transformation will be undertaken. If the right wing governs, a redoubled offensive against the working class and the rights of women, LGBTI people, migrants, and all the exploited and oppressed is coming. Whatever happens, we will fight together with many more people. But resistance cannot be simply taking to the streets; the travails of progressivism are making it clear to us that we need a left independent of the regime, as loyal to the subordinate classes as the right wing is to the capitalists. This project for Anticapitalists is called ecosocialism, and it will have to be built through social resistance and also by drawing the relevant lessons on the political terrain: neither resigning ourselves to the lesser

evil nor letting history continue to be dictated by the same old, same old politics.

Picture: CUP (Popular Unity Candidacies) Catalonia election banner: https://cup.cat/

Spanish State General Election Sunday 23 July – Can The Right Be Stopped?

*Dave Kellaway of Anti*Capitalist Resistance assesses what is at stake in Sunday's general election in the Spanish state.*

With under a week to go, the polls continue to give the mainstream conservative party, the PP (People's Party), a lead of four percentage points over the governing PSOE (Socialist Workers Party–social democratic). Sanchez, the current Prime Minister, may still scrape through, but it cannot be excluded that the PP may get a majority on its own–the electoral system disproportionately benefits the rural seats where the conservatives are stronger–but it is likely that it will have to rely on the support of the hard-right, post-fascist Vox (Voice party). At the moment, this group has many direct links with the fascist Francoist regime (Franco only died in 1975). This makes it less post-fascist than groups like Meloni's Fratelli d'Italia in Italy.

Already, Vox has gone into government with the PP in several regions following the recent elections. Open attacks have been stepped up on women's right to control their own bodies, against gay and trans people, and to stop the law on memory that helps provide the truth about the Franco regime's

repression. It looks likely that despite PP leader Feijoo's election bluff at getting his own majority, he will deal with Vox to form a government.

As we see elsewhere in Europe, there is an interaction between the mainstream right and the hard-right post-fascists, whereby they both influence each other. The mainstream takes on more and more hard-right policies, particularly those linked to culture wars and anti-migrant racism. The post-fascists try to look a bit more like the mainstream right wing by reducing and minimising their links with a fascist past, which keeps any militia-style organising well out of sight. Indeed, Vox, like the Fratelli in Italy or the RN in France, prioritises getting influence inside the police and army.

Party	**% vote**	**seats**
PSOE	28.2	101-109
PP	32.0	130-138
Vox	14.1	35-41
Sumar	14.0	34-40
Others (nationalists mostly)	11.7	32-40

Source: Simple Logica, July 17 (in El Diario)

Sanchez has gambled with this snap election. He could have waited until the end of the year. He hopes to take advantage of a reflex among progressive forces against the entry of the post-fascist Vox into regional and local governments. Maybe he thinks that he has a better chance of generating that reaction during the initial stages of the formation of these governments before the outcry dies down. Certainly, he is risking his political career if he is defeated. It is still too close to call, and it may all end with an unstable political deadlock that will mean going to the polls again in the short term.

The right-wing forces have benefited from the collapse and dissolution of the so-called modernising centre-right

Cuidadanos party. The latter’s votes have mostly transferred to the PP. Although there is much talk of Vox, the main increase in votes, according to the surveys, has been for the PP rather than the post-fascists. Vox is forecast to get fewer seats at the moment than the 52 it got last time. The PP, on the other hand, is predicted to increase its seats from 88 to over 130. The main focus of Sanchez’s campaigning has been on the right-wing threat rather than proposing any sort of policy that will decisively deal with the cost of living crisis or the need for greater social spending. Upping the verbal ante of anti-fascism and the threat to democracy did not really work in the last general elections in France and Italy. Maybe the massive increase in abstention and alienation from the political process makes such invocations less convincing.

What about those currents to the left of the PSOE?

Podemos was a political current that built itself on the radical street mobilisations of the Indignados 15M movement in 2011. Its founders included the revolutionary Anticapitalistas current. Its political programme called for a clear break with the existing regime and for a new arrangement for the nations (like Catalonia and the Basque Country) of the Spanish state. Its strategy was to build a new sort of movement quite distinct from the traditional PSOE or PP. Iglesias, its charismatic leader, called on its militants to overtake the PSOE at the ballot box. Now it has come full circle. It built itself on a different trajectory from the old CP United Left, which acted as a left satellite ally of the PSOE; some of its founders, like Iglesias, had personally broken with that tradition. Yet by 2018 and the victory of the PSOE in the general election, Podemos had jumped back on the old bus and

fully joined up with the PSOE government. Podemos leaders had their ministries, there were many career openings for its cadres, and its apparatus could be consolidated. As day follows night, this turn logically meant that forces inside Podemos would complete the ideological trajectory towards more moderate policies.

So Yolanda Diaz, who was a deputy prime minister and a Podemos leader, launched a new political movement called Sumar (Come Together) and laid down an ultimatum to her comrades: Join me in a new broader electoral coalition. Unlike the foundation of Podemos with congresses, motions, programmes, and debate, this new movement seems to be entirely built around Diaz. Podemos was never that democratic, but Sumar seems worse. Diaz's rhetoric about building a new progressive movement does not extend much reflection about the active involvement of activists in how their organisation is run. Melenchon's France Insoumise has similar problems with internal democracy, and this issue has been mostly unresolved in all the new left radical movements in the last decade. Syriza's leadership in Greece was able to ignore the majority position of the membership over its policies.

Despite quite a lot of rancour, especially around whether you were given a winnable seat on the Sumar slate, Podemos agreed to follow Diaz. The old United Left ally and an earlier moderate split from Podemos, Errejon's Mas Pais, were Sumar supporters from the start. Currently, Sumar is competing with Vox for third place on around 13–14%, which is roughly the score Unidad Podemos got last time. It does not appear that Sumar is tapping into any new areas of support. From its origins in Podemos, a new political current based on a movement from below and with a view of breaking with the system, Sumar has become mostly about fighting over which positions you can hold on to in the institutions.

The left campaigns to prevent a PP/Vox government; indeed, it defends the reforms made by the PSOE/UP government in the

realm of democratic, labour, or LBGTQ rights. But it refuses to be silent on the record of this government—for example, Sanchez did nothing to stop the massacre of migrants in Melilla in 2022. Reforms to the notorious Mordaza or Gag Law are limited; it still gives police the right to interpret 'lack of respect' or 'disobedience'. The changes to the pro-business labour laws did restrict the use of temporary contracts, but much of the previous right-wing law remained on the statute book. The continuity with the PP's labour reform is such that Mariano Rajoy, the right-wing prime minister who oversaw the law, told the conservative ABC newspaper that the PSOE and Podemos "left the labour reform where it was." The reforms to housing law do cap rents at 3% and give some more rights to renters, but the government has done little to build more social housing.

Former Labour Party Prime Minister Gordon Brown, in an article in the Guardian, correctly warns of the international threat of far-right and neo-fascist forces. He shows how Vox is calling for nationalist parties to be outlawed and wants to weaken laws and policies on domestic violence. However, the whole article uncritically hails Sanchez as a champion of progressive forces. a defender of migrants (Melilla?) and an opponent of neo-liberal austerity.

Radical left currents that win seats in parliament do not have to go into coalition with social liberal parties like the PSOE. They can still prevent the election of right-wing governments and allow mainstream left-of-centre parties to form governments. In Portugal, the Left Bloc did precisely that while not going into coalition. It is also possible to negotiate around certain measures in exchange for your votes. At the same time, you can continue to develop a movement that defends workers interests with a strategy of a clear break with capital and its state.

Next Sunday's vote will make a difference in the conditions in which the left and progressive forces can operate. The right

and neo-fascists must be voted against and stopped, but an alternative to the PSOE's slightly more liberal management of the capitalist economy needs to be built.

18 July 2023

Originally published by Anti*Capitalist Resistance: https://anticapitalistresistance.org/spanish-general-election-23-july-can-the-right-be-stopped/

Picture: Adelante Andalucia an electoral coalition supported by Anticapitalistas are standing a candidate in the Cadiz constituency for the Congress of the Spanish State. Manifesto>> here (in Spanish/Castilian).

Spanish State: assessment of the failed repeal of the labour law

The political consequences and aftermath of the new labour law reform deal recently signed by the Spanish state government (a coalition of the Spanish social democratic party (PSOE) and the left wing Unidos Podemos) and the employers, with the consent of the two major trade unions (UGT and CCOO) are examined below in an article from January 2022, written by Brais Fernández from Anticapitalistas Madrid. [Anticapitalistas is the confederal section in the Spanish state of the Fourth International and a sister organisation of ecosocialist.scot.]

The article examines which points of the labour law have been touched and why these measure are unsatisfactory for working

people, and demonstrates that the previously ruling conservative People's Party's (PP) former labour law policy has not been repealed by the new government, but that the changes are insufficient (in 2012 Spanish unions organised a general strike against the PP labour laws). This political development illustrates some of the difficulties for those on the radical left who join in a coalition with social democratic parties, the main minister responsible being a member of the Communist Party.

Finally, the article looks at the analysis of the most relevant Spanish state political actors and what to expect from the alternative left. Since the article was written Pablo Iglesias, the former leader of Podemos, has been advising the employers' organisations to support the changes. The picture above shows Galician trade unions marching to reject the deal.

As this is a complex issue and our readers may not be familiar with Spanish state politics, ecosocialist.scot has provided an extended glossary of its own below the article



Spanish workers march against labour laws in 2012

Picture: Spanish state general strike against labour law in 2012

Political assessment of the failed repeal of labour law in the Spanish State

Introduction

After months of discussion at discreet negotiating tables, the government, led in this case by [Communist Party minister] Yolanda Díaz, CCOO and UGT trade unions and the CEOE (Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales – the Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations) announced an agreement to readapt the labour reform.
Far from the programmatic pact signed by the government, this agreement abandons the "repeal" approach and assumes as its basis the 2012 reform of the Popular Party. The governmental left has tried to sell (once again) the agreement as historic; sectors of the right, such as the newspaper ABC, the famous and mediocre liberal economist Juan Ramón Rallo, the president of the CEOE and Luis Garicano have come out in defence of the agreement, considering that, despite the irritation caused by the fact that it is led by the left, it does not touch (despite certain limitations on temping) the basic pillars of the labour model implemented by the bipartisan party.

What is being changed and what is left untouched

In terms of changes in labour legislation, it is difficult to sell this as a success, although the illusionist machinery of progressivism tries to do so with its mixture of blackmailing and passive-aggressive argumentation against the critical left, seasoned with an increasingly sham and gloomy verbal illusionism. The lower cost of redundancies are untouched, the flexibility of objective dismissals is maintained, the lack of

administrative control in collective dismissals, the processing salaries are not recovered? It remains to be seen whether the priority application of sectoral agreements will be applied to existing agreements, although it only affects wages, not working conditions. The only thing that can be sold as an improvement of rights has to do with the extension of the agreements, a concession to the trade union apparatus that makes it possible to avoid further formal setbacks after years in which the bargaining power of these actors had strongly regressed. Employers are satisfied: they retain the possibility of free and cheap dismissal and, on the other hand, the full capacity to organize work as they want, because they are able to modify conditions at will.

In other words, we are not dealing with a repeal of the PP labour reform or a new labour reform: we are dealing with a small correction of the framework of labour precariousness and pro-corporate flexibility that was historically imposed by the PP, PSOE and the CEOE, protected by the trade union apparatuses.

At the heart of the consensus, modernization

For some time now, the leaders of PSOE and Unidos Podemos (UP) have been insisting on the idea of a new modernization. Perhaps the text that most clearly expresses this thesis, unfortunately little discussed on the left, is an article by Alberto Garzón and Enrique Santiago [1], which went unnoticed and which tried to provide a theoretical basis for what Pablo Iglesias had been saying for some time through his media statements.

This article dealt with the commitment of the progressive left to the modernization of the Spanish state. Modernization is the equivalent in economic policy terms of the term regeneration in politics. It is about updating the forms and

sectors that are the backbone of Spanish capitalism. In the article, the classic rhetoric of green capitalism is combined with ridiculous illusions in the capacity of progressivism to direct investment and capitalist development. Absurd illusions, not only because of the nature of capitalism, but also because UP is a subaltern part of a weak government that is not going to undertake any reform that would modify the relationship between state and capital, and that could generate a disruptive counter-trend against neoliberalism.

The most interesting thing about the article, beyond these old and extravagant assertions about the "progressive development of the productive forces" and the capacity of the left to guide this process, is the political background, which has become a dogma of faith in the new UP led by Yolanda Díaz. The two leaders of the IU and the PCE recognized an ally in certain sectors of the bosses. The article clearly took up the old axiom shared by right-wing Eurocommunism and social democracy converted to socio-liberalism (whose most advanced synthesis is the Italian Democratic Party): modernization is "something that the government can only solve if part of the business class, the most dynamic and lively, is part of the solution". In other words, the adversary is not the business class, because the short-term objective is no longer to weaken its social power, but to strengthen it. Instead he only enemy is the political right wing, which with its outbursts fails to fulfil its state responsibilities and becomes an obstacle to modernization.

This progressive modernization faces certain objective limits (the role of the Spanish state in the global market, the multiple crises experienced by capitalism at the global level and the Spanish specificities that derive from it), but let us be clear. The aim of modernization is not to modernize the Spanish productive structure: it is to reactivate the Spanish growth cycle, because in reality, our modernizers (liberal or Eurocommunist) only believe that the economy can be activated

through the reactivation of capitalist profits.

The famous consensus, the fetish word of our new-found Transition, reappears on the basis of these objectives. The famous consensus, a pseudo-Gramscian caricature justified on the basis of agreement with who should be your irreconcilable enemy and built on the exclusion of broad sectors that should be allies: precarious workers, migrants, workers in small and medium enterprises – little is said about how this labour reform fails to include them within the umbrella of union bargaining – and a long etcetera of the vast majority of working men and women. But let us be fair. If the thesis is that we must prioritize the alliance and links with employers, the non-labour reform promoted by Yolanda Díaz fulfils its role to perfection. It is no more and no less than a translation in labour terms of the famous modernization, as it adapts the regulatory structure of labour to the political and economic needs of capitalism. That is to say, this new labour agreement complements the other two great axes on which progressivism sustains the modernizing project, reintegrating the trade union leaderships in its management: the distribution of European funds (money that goes to big business as a way of compensating for its crisis of profitability through public subsidy, an orthodox neoliberal practice) and wage containment to prevent inflation from being paid for by corporate profits, the first example of which we saw with the tanks in Cádiz.

In short, I do not think that we are facing a move towards anything other than this modernizing project that we have enunciated. This discussion is important because it locates us on the political and economic map on which progressivism is moving and prefigures a certain political position. It is a question of assuming a position of active opposition to modernization and to the different political milestones that make it possible, as well as building an alternative to it, but also, and this is important, defining the political

scenarios that this project (still weak and subject to the volatility of crises) can generate.

Political readings

Politically, this is a defeat for the forces that for years have mobilized against this model of bipartisanship (including, of course, the militancy of the left-wing forces that signed the agreement), even though it is a political triumph for the modernizing integration of the left. I know it is fashionable to sell the idea that it is a partial advance, but from a political point of view it is false to sell it that way. The government agreement is breached, as the labour reform is not repealed. All the parties in the government bloc agreed on that point, achieved through years of struggle, because, let's not forget, this is a demand that has been kept alive by mobilization. After years of insisting that things were changed through the BOE, it turns out that when the left has a parliamentary majority to pass certain laws, it does not happen. Moreover, an unelected actor like the CEOE is introduced to determine the whole negotiation process. This negotiation has been a good indication of how the logic of the political regime inherited from the Transition works. When the right governs, the social consensus is broken and only businessmen rule. When the left governs, the social consensus is reorganized so that they also continue to rule. The hypothesis that UP in the executive would guarantee government agreements has already been shelved without much hesitation by the leaders of the left: now it is only a question of selling as progress what is a surrender a necessary and non-contingent counterpart of a profound strategic shift.

In this sense, it seems to me that from the left (I use this term for lack of a better and equally broad one), we must discuss some questions.

I believe that this is not simply a problem of narrative or of

how the government has sold what is evidently the acceptance of the current political order with some modifications. The problem is political and strategic. It is as naïve to believe that an anti-capitalist transformation is possible within this regime as it is to think that there is no margin for struggle and partial gains. Partial gains can be wedges, temporary and always subject to the need to be defended, which the subaltern classes manage to introduce and which aim to improve the conditions of life and struggle within and against the system itself. To renounce them is to renounce politics as well, and worse, to assume for example the idea that an impoverished working class will be more radical, when the opposite is the case. It is the strength and strengthening of our class, in a broad sense and without corporate residues, that will allow us to be in a better position to take on transformative challenges. In reality, it is about betting on introducing those wedges not to get out of the crisis, but to live and fight in it, displacing it through political and economic struggle towards capital, while the working class grows stronger. It is there, at that point, that agreements of struggle between the left can be found.

I make this clear because I think it is wrong to assume that this precise course of events was inevitable. It is the result of strategic decisions and the direction taken by the governmental left, which they are now trying to compensate for with cackling about unity and new leaderships. A strategy that seeks to improve the famous balance of power must be based on social and political conflict, and not on modernizing consensus, and requires two objectives: using all spaces to extend the conflict (and that includes using positions in the state and in parliament in that context, blocking whatever needs to be blocked to achieve these partial conquests) and a broad and organized will to mobilize. There has been no appetite for this in the governmental left; there has been no capacity on the left outside the government or in the social movements. A bitter lesson, but one that deserves to be

discussed without compromise, avoiding in my opinion falling into that fetish ("the social or the political") mentioned by Daniel Bensaid: we need to fight in the streets and in the workplaces, a stronger fighting trade unionism, capable of dragging along sectors today imbricated in the organisations of the modernizing consensus, but also their own political instruments and projects, so as not to depend on a logic of pressure that allows the apparatuses of the left to end up integrated into the state and assuming pro-capitalist management. To put it clearly: calls for struggle are not enough, we need political organisation to confront this new stage. Putting pressure on and delegating politics to the left is also an ideological mechanism that only generates disappointments and defeats.

In the short term, preventing this rift from closing

Everyone knows that this does not end either the problems or the debate on the world of work. Propaganda has very short legs. Both Basque and Galician trade unionism, as well as alternative trade unionism in the rest of the Spanish state, have already shown their opposition to this compromise. A political position correlated with this is also needed: we will see what happens with parties such as Bildu or ERC, as it would be good if they stood firm in their announced rejection of the reform and did not turn around at the first opportunity. [2] It has been decided to maintain the same labour law as in the previous stage, in order to deepen the "modernizing progressive" consensus. We do not yet know the political effects of this, although it is possible that when the propaganda high wears off, disaffection towards the governmental left will continue to grow, without, to be honest, other alternative forces being able to channel this disaffection towards the left in the short term. Let us draw the strength to fight in the short term, but let us also

prepare ourselves for a new stage, which, despite the consensus from above, promises to be turbulent. Because modernization is nothing more and nothing less than a reorganization of the ruling class in its struggle against the working and subordinate classes.

30 December 2021

Brais Fernandez is an activist in Anticapitalistas, the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish State, and is a former activist in Podemos in Madrid.

FOOTNOTES

[1] https://www.eldiario.es/opinion/tribuna-abierta/modernizacion-espana-enemigos_129_6295329.html Garzón is a prominent member of Izquierda Unida (IU – United Left), Santiago is the General Secretary of the Spanish Communist Party.

[2] Bildu is a Basque political party, ERC a Catalan one. *[NB Both parties abstained on the formation of the PSOE/UP government, see below. ERC, Republican Left of Catalonia, is closely aligned with the SNP in Scotland.]*

Reproduced from International Viewpoint, https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7460

Glossary by ecosocialist.scot (see also footnote [2])

ABC – one of the three largest circulation newspapers in the Spanish state.

BOE – Boletín Oficial del Estado, the official publication/website of the Government of Spain (Gobierno de España). Since January 2021 this government has been a coalition of left-of-centre parties, PSOE and UP, with the

external support of other left/nationalist parties in the Parliament

UGT – Unión General de Trabajadores (General Union of Workers) a major Spanish state union federation historically aligned with the PSOE

CCOO – Workers' Commissions (Comisiones Obreras) the largest Spanish state union organisation, originally linked to the PCE

PSOE – Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers Party), the Spanish social democratic party which has led the government since January 2020

UP – Unidas/Unidos Podemos ("United We Can") an electoral alliance of left wing parties: **Podemos** ("We Can") and United Left/**IU** (Izquierda Unida) itself an alliance led by the Communist Party of Spain (**PCE**); UP is the junior partner in the January 2021 coalition led by the PSOE and holds Deputy Prime Minister and ministerial positions, including Yolanda Diaz, the minister responsible for labour law who is a member of PCE. The leader of Podemos and original Deputy Prime Minister in the Jan 2020 government, **Pablo Iglesias**, retired from politics in 2021 following the heavy defeat of UP in local elections in Madrid that he resigned from government to lead the campaign for.

CEOE – Spanish Confederation of Business Organizations (Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales), the main employers' organisation in the Spanish state

PP – People's Party (Partido Popular) the main conservative party in the Spanish state and the governing party at the time of the current labour law in 2012. It lost a vote of confidence in 2018 and was replaced by a minority PSOE government, subsequently replaced by the PSOE/UP coalition in January 2020. Historically the PP was the main right wing party emerging from the Franco dictatorship and included elements of Francoism in its base but it now faces a challenge

to its right from the more explicitly pro-fascist **VOX** party ("Voice").

AC – Anticapitalists (Anticapitalistas) the confederal section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state and one of the founding organisations of Podemos. It left Podemos following the formation of the government coalition with PSOE in January 2020.

Eurocommunism – an ideological trend that emerged in the PCE in Spanish state and other European Communist Parties during the 1970s, that while representing progress away from unconditional support of the Soviet Union also marked a move to the right and political convergence with European social democratic politics.

Galicia, Basque country (Galiza, Euskadi) – two of the three national territories (officially: Autonomous Communities) within the Spanish state, the third being Catalonia (Catalunya); there are movements for independence from the Spanish state in all three of these countries which also have their own languages and history, with certain similarities with the positions of Wales and Scotland within the UK state. Some of the pro-independence or nationalist parties within these territories supported the formation of the PSOE/UP coalition government in January 2020, some abstained, while some, such as the left wing CUP (Popular Unity Candidacies) in Catalonia, opposed it on the grounds that the government maintains opposition to self determination for these territories.

Introduction and Glossary by Lorena Sorentes and Mike Picken, for ecosocialist.scot

Some lessons of the Podemos Experience

22 Jun 2021

Dave Kellaway looks back at the Pablo Iglesias era which found the Spanish left in the political ascendancy.

A month or so ago, Pablo Iglesias failed in his bid to push back the right wing ascendancy in the Madrid regional elections. The defeat turned into a personal turning point for him as he resigned from all his leadership responsibilities both in in Unidad Podemos (United We Can) party and in the PSOE (Spanish Socialist Workers Party) government.

It marked the bitter end of a personal journey in which he had played a leading role for a time in trying to radically challenge the 1978 regime that emerged from the end of the fascist Franco dictatorship. He had 'reached for the sky' and helped create what he called 'a great electoral war machine' that threatened, momentarily, the hold of the PSOE on the left of politics in the Spanish State.

His political background was within the old Izquierda Unida (IU – United Left) as a left Eurocommunist. In the end ironically he had led his grouping full circle back into that sort of framework. It is a junior partner, a left cover for what is essentially a social liberal government that is no challenge to the 1978 regime. Some pundits even suggest that the current incarnation of the IU will recuperate the crumbling remains of the Podemos movement.

Nevertheless as the Anticapitalistas' comrades, Miguel Urban and Brais Fernandez correctly note:

> *On the one hand the balance sheet is disappointing. Podemos was not capable of reaching the objectives it had set at its*

*foundation and has been converted, in Gramscian terms, into a 'transformismo' project [=as a strategy to prevent the formation of an organized working-class movement by co-opting and neutralizing its ideas and leaders within a ruling coalition, a passive revolution with no self-organised movement –**Tr**]. However its establishment led to the opening of a new, unexpected political cycle . For the first time in decades, an anti-neo-liberal force aimed to conquer political power.*

MIGUEL URBAN AND BRAIS FERNANDEZ

Rise of Broad left or class struggle movements

In the last few months there have been a number of articles and books on the ***Pasokification*** of European social democratic parties. It refers to the way the Greek social democrats of Pasok led their party into disintegration through becoming more and more moderate. Progressive, mass radical movements like Podemos, Syriza in Greece, Corbynism in Britain, Mélenchon's party in France were partly reactions from the left to this process of Pasokification. They responded to the increasingly social liberal line of the social democrats exemplified by Blair or the Zapatero government in the Spanish state.

The restructuring of global capital from the 1980s with the destruction of the old European industrial heartlands severely weakened the trade unions and communities which were the historic base of these traditional left parties. Neo-liberal austerity policies following the 2008 financial crisis also fuelled some social mobilisations particularly in Greece and the Spanish state with the 'indignados' (angry ones) bringing tens of thousands onto the streets for sustained periods. The younger generation, including many unemployed or underemployed

graduates, joined forces with trade unionists, especially from the public sector. People wanted proper work and decent education and welfare.

Social democratic parties were no longer able to provide any reforms to protect working people as they had done during the post war boom when the bosses were able to make profit while conceding an increase in workers living standards and welfare provision. Even later during periods of capitalist growth stimulated by the fall of the Berlin Wall, cheap goods from China and an expansion of credit we saw a social democratic leader like Blair keen to embrace the new capitalist reality even while providing some concessions on social spending.

However it is now clear that all of these radical movements have been defeated and failed to sustain their challenge to capitalist stability. It is worth examining the Podemos experience both for specific lessons and because its strategic problems mirrored some of the problems facing the Corbyn project.

Origins of Podemos

Podemos was formed in January 2014. The mass demonstrations of the 15th May movement popularly known as the 'indignados' were ebbing. A group of university politics professors in Madrid and the Anticapitalist Left, the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish State, decided the time was right to set up a new political movement that could channel the hopes of the indignados. According to Urban and Fernandez (op cit.) there were four main influences on their thinking:

a. the historic competitor to the left of the PSOE, the Izquierda Unida, formed from the Eurocommunist Spanish CP, had been completely bypassed by the indignados and had failed to take any real lead
b. the Left Bloc in Portugal had successfully brought

together various left forces and had become a national political force that had even overtaken the Portuguese Communist Party

c. Syrizia had at that stage not been defeated and was inspiring people across Europe
d. the Bolivarian experience led by Chavez in Venezuela was particularly important for both Iglesias and his friend, Errejon, who had spent time there.

The initial programme adopted was opposition to austerity. It included removing the addition to the constitution supported by both the PSOE and the conservative Peoples Party that enshrined 'balanced budgets' regulated by the EU. It was for full implementation of the 128th article of the constitution which states:

> *All wealth of the country in all its forms and no matter who owns it, is subordinated to the people's interest.*

Exit from NATO and full abortion rights were other key points as well as a commitment to challenging the rigid unionism of the Spanish constitution with respect to Catalonia and Euzkadi. It is important to remember these points to assess how far the Podemos leadership moved away from such a programme in subsequent years.

According to a participant in these meetings Iglesias was happy to sign up to all these points but Errejon was much less enthusiastic. This probably reflected both that Iglesias understood that these were just paper positions that could be modified and also foreshadowed Errejon's eventual split from Podemos to a more moderate position.

So we can see this movement formed in a quite a different way to Corbynism which emerged out of the traditional Campaign group of Labour MPs. There were no founding programmatic discussions for this project and while the radical left helped

mobilise behind Corbyn we had no leadership role. Although there were some links with the anti-austerity mobilisations of previous years, especially those around student fees, the scale of these mobilisations were much smaller than in the Spanish state. Social Media though played an important role in both movements. There were some similarities in the demographics of the activists.

Opportunities and dangers of explosive growth

Podemos broke through immediately at the European elections in 2014 getting nearly 8% and 5 MEPs. In the 2015 and 2016 general elections it received around 21% of the vote, coming close to an historic overtaking of the PSOE. In October 2014 it had 170,000 members and up to 500,000 members were claimed in 2020 but this was before members had to pay. This was phenomenal growth for a new party. All the forecasts completely underestimated its success.

Something similar happened in Britain with Corbynism – at least until after the 2017 general election. Politics is much more volatile today because of the crisis of traditional party allegiances, the emergence of new politicised generations and the acceleration that social media can produce. As we have seen with Corbynism it can go up very quickly but also deflate rapidly too.

The initiators of the Podemos project were swamped and overrun by the impact and the sheer numbers who flooded in. As Urban and Fernandez ruefully admit:

> *This huge upsurge in interest and numbers was channelled much more skilfully by the 'populist hypothesis' that the 'anti-capitalist perspective'. The latter always had to intervene within the framework of the former.*

MIGUEL URBAN AND BRAIS FERNANDEZ

The Anticapitalistas (ACs) were the only organised left group involved in the project. It had a few hundred members with a thinnish implantation outside the major cities. Some of the key activists from the social movements were initially sceptical about Podemos. Inevitably once things looked good many of the people who first disdained it then joined and often just followed Iglesias uncritically.

Emmanuel Lopez in this article examines the sociological phenomena underlying Podemos. He points out the key role of the new precarious, unemployed graduate generation which was attracted to the party. We saw a similar phenomenon with Corbynism.

But this explosive growth meant a rapid social promotion or integration into the institutional process for many of these new activists. It also helps explain how the local branches (circulos) became hollowed out. This issue can also affect radical or revolutionaries in new, rapidly growing parties. Revolutionary Marxists from the Socialist Democracy current experienced this when they helped build Lula's PT (Workers' Party) in Brazil. Bureaucratisation and integration does not just affect reformists. Lopez (op cit.) again comments on this:

> *After the 2015 general election the party had thousands of political positons and jobs available for distribution – MPs, senators, councillors and full time staff. To become part of this 'industry of representation' was subjectively very appealing. In the final analysis this explains why the party was able to keep some sort of base after it abandonment of mobilisation in the communities and workplaces after 2016*
>
> *EMMANUEL LOPEZ*

Neither left nor right, ‘construct the people’

The Podemos leadership at the first national congress at Vistalegre accepted an organisational model where minorities like the Anticapitalistas were deliberately excluded from the leadership team. Tendencies were not given any sort of proportional representation. Plebiscitary online voting was established too which meant tens of thousands voted online on proposals put forward by the Iglesias team. Local and regional structures with regular debate and the election of delegates – the ‘traditional’ form of left political organisation were shunned in favour of social media. This made it more difficult to develop a rich political debate in the local branches.

A few years later this top down, limited form of internal democracy actually made it difficult for a key ally of Iglesias, Errejon, to defend his positions when he broke from the Iglesias political line towards a more moderate position. He had been an enthusiastic supporter of the original internal rules!

Consequently there were large majorities for the Iglesias strategy that was inspired both by Latin American left populism and specifically the ideas of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. In today’s conditions to win political power it was argued the left had to abandon some of its historic categories. So Podemos adopted the slogan ‘neither left nor right’.

It is true that in terms of the mainstream left and right of centre parties, there were less and less differences in how they managed austerity so there was some support for this approach. However this led to a disconnection with the material world of class exploitation through capitalism, class struggle and the repressive nature of the state. There was an overemphasis on ideological processes so the task of

progressive parties is to ‘construct the people’, through effective communication and marketing, providing a new political narrative that people can understand and support. This popular coalition is transversal in the sense that it can pick up support across all political, ideological currents and is not limited by narrow class definitions or antagonisms.

There is nothing wrong with thinking about how we present a socialist or class point of view to a mass audience but the links to capitalist reality cannot be severed. Conversely of course wooden propaganda from orthodox Marxists does not work either.

On one level, this huge investment in developing a tight-knit centralised team that developed a sophisticated media communications strategy was successful in building support, bringing Podemos to over 20% of the vote. Some electoral material was brilliant in conveying the unfairness of the system was and why change was needed. We can learn from it.

For once the left was being audacious and optimistic about what was possible, that it could challenge a big mainstream party like the PSOE and even overtake it. In some polls it actually did. But along with the ‘promotion’ of activists into full timers or party representatives, it meant the local circles were neglected. Self-organisation, building alternative political structures and forging a vibrant new culture from the bottom up, were not priorities. As long as it was riding high in the polls it was difficult for alternative voices like the Anticapitalistas to convince people of a different way forward.

As Lopez remarks in his article (op cit.):

> *in this way ‘populism’ fulfilled a role for this generation similar to the one Marxism played for the generation of the 1978 transition; it was like an ‘elites theory’ that articulated an understanding of power not based on a theory*

> *of political economy and classes and a consequent complex analysis of the conjuncture but rather as a sort of 'popular articulation' converted into a business of communications expertise.*
>
> ***EMMANUEL LOPEZ***

Such ideas sat easily with a leadership predominantly made up of university professors and a membership that was predominantly composed of youngish graduates.Before Podemos, Iglesias had run a very successful political TV programme.

The workers movement had been weakened and become more isolated as a result of de-industrialisation and restructuring. This also means that mass communications have taken over a role and weight that the organic intellectuals and independent institutions of the workers movement formerly contested. We can see this to a degree in Britain too. Look how the mass media assault on Corbyn was more difficult to resist given the weakness of the workers movement's independent media and institutions.

Three strategic errors

Fernandez and Urban identify three key strategic problems with Podemos:

- *an ingenuous approach to the question of state power*

It adopted mainstream academic political theory, considering the state as a fluid body, a social relation but did not draw out the real implications of such statements. The judiciary, police and the army, because of their class and ideological composition, are bodies that are structurally reactionary and can only be neutralised with active, antagonistic social forces. On the other hand workers in the health, education and public administration, where Podemos had a lot of support, are a potential base for 'constituent' change from within the

state itself.

None of the lessons of the Syrizia debacle were taken on board. In the end Podemos won control in certain places and today are junior partners in the PSOE government but are managing the system within the usual limits. Most worryingly the leadership exaggerates and distorts the actual progressive impact of its executive power e.g. with some of the welfare reforms it has lobbied for.

- *a wrong notion of political economy*

The Podemos leadership also saw society as a field of political manoeuvring where economic power was an external force to challenge but not the social relation that configured the whole of society. It went from its early promises to take over key sectors of the economy to a classic Keynesianism. The spell when Podemos governed Madrid exemplified that as it managed the same old urban development led by finance capital.

- *the national question in the Spanish State*

Again initially Podemos was able to lead the debate about re-founding the constitutional system but this was later abandoned so today it has lost ground in Catalonia and Euzkadi to progressive or independent nationalists who are seen as more militantly against the centralising regime.

Why did a radical or revolutionary alternative not do better?

Readers may say you could be right about some or all of your criticisms of Podemos but why didn’t the revolutionaries who were inside Podemos from the beginning not pick up more support and challenge the Iglesias leadership more strongly?

Throughout the process, the Anticapitalists(AC) both enthusiastically built Podemos and maintained an alternative

strategy which meant they were excluded from the central leadership team. Comrades took on party posts and became regional or European MPs. The mass media regularly reported on the AC's alternative positions at the two congresses. The fight for a different internal democracy was proven to be justified as the subsequent Errejon split showed the failure of the movement to manage its internal discussions. The very weak or non-existence of local branches today also bears out their analysis.

After the leadership decided to become ministers in the PSOE government it was widely reported on TV and the newspapers that Anticapitalistas had decided to leave the party. They had argued for the Portuguese solution favoured by the Left Bloc of not participating in the government but allowing it to be formed and supporting it on an issue by issue basis.

Participating in such broad based class struggle or left social democratic movements is a good way of building a radical or revolutionary current. As a result of their involvement the ACs have increased and consolidated their membership and strengthened their national profile. Those groups that stood apart in sectarian purity have not done any better than those forces who helped build the new movements. Indeed we saw the same thing happen with the Corbynist project, those groups who stayed apart from it have not gained from its demise. Today AC leaders strongly defend their involvement. In any case, the final outcome could not be predicted in advance. Just as in Britain with the Corbyn experience the left has not gone back to the position there were in during the Miliband period. Gains have been made.

However this is not to say that the AC comrades made no mistakes or that tactical moves are easy to make. Ensuring that you put resources in maintaining your profile and own organisation while participating in a broader party is essential. It is easy to become the best builders and become sucked into all the broader party's tasks. This is also true

for revolutionaries who choose to work inside the Labour Party.

You also have to break out of a small group mentality when you are thrown into a group with mass support. Negotiating with new partners on a national level takes a different skill to the sort of interaction you are used to. Coming to terms with the new communications is also important. The ACs had, to a degree, some difficulty in all these areas.

Another problem is preparing for a possible exit if this movement collapses or moves decisively in a moderate direction. Deciding when to leave and doing it in a non-sectarian way is often difficult. The mass media in the Spanish state commented on how amiable the parting was in areas like Andalusia where the ACs had a strong base and a well-known local leader like Teresa Rodriguez. Ritualistic denunciation of betrayal is not always helpful.

Finally, Urban and Fernandez make an interesting historical reference in considering the Podemos story:

> *In our opinion here is a tension between the Leninist truth – organisations can be built if there has been an accumulation of cadre prior to their development – and the Luxemburgist one – organisations are built during the process itself. In the case of Podemos this tension was resolved in the worst possible way. Neither the political nucleus of Podemos had a sufficient accumulation of cadre that could structure the emerging process nor did the process itself compensate for those deficiencies. The limitations of the period combined with subjective decisions in the worst form possible.*
>
> ***MIGUEL URBAN AND BRAIS FERNANDEZ***

Today Podemos has gone from a party with an anti-system and constituent strategy to occupying a space traditionally held by the Spanish Communist Party but without the latter’s

organic links with the workers movement. At the same time it has severely weakened its links with the social forces that formed it in the first place. The anticapitalist left has to rebuild the movement from the bottom up both inside and outside the institutions.

Reprinted from Anti*Capitalist Resistance,