

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias steps down as Spanish deputy prime minister

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In an eight-minute video posted to Twitter on Monday, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias announced he will resign as deputy prime minister from the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government to run an “anti-fascist” campaign in the snap regional elections in Madrid. He also announced that Podemos Minister of Labor Yolanda Díaz would take over as deputy prime minister and would be the party’s lead candidate in the next general elections.

Iglesias said he made the decision “to prevent the far right from taking over the institutions” in Madrid. This was a reference to projections showing that a coalition between the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and the fascist Vox party would win the Madrid regional elections, set for May 4.

Fascistic forces pose a very real, mortal threat to the working class, as Donald Trump showed on January 6 by leading a fascist mob to try to overturn the results of the US elections. The working class cannot entrust the struggle against this danger, however, to Iglesias and Podemos, a pseudo-left party of the affluent middle class. Indeed, Podemos has become the principal instrument through which Spain’s increasingly fascist ruling establishment implements policy.

Referring to Vox, Iglesias cynically said: “we must prevent these criminals, these criminals who support the [fascist Francisco Franco] dictatorship; who apologize for state terrorism; who promote violence against migrants, against homosexuals and against feminists; who, when some military men speak of shooting 26 million reds, say it’s their people. These forces may attain power in Madrid, with all that that this implies for the rest of the country.”

It was the PSOE-Podemos government itself, however, that implemented a fascist herd immunity policy, opposing lockdowns and letting the COVID-19 virus spread in order to save profits. This has led to over 100,000 deaths and 3.2 million infections in Spain. Social

opposition has been met with police crackdowns and threats to deploy the military onto the streets of Madrid.

The individual Iglesias leaves behind as deputy prime minister, Podemos and Communist Party (PCE) member Yolanda Díaz, bears direct responsibility for these infections and deaths. Working closely with the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and social-democratic General Union of Labor (UGT) trade unions, she imposed a return to non-essential work, accelerating the virus’ spread.

The PSOE-Podemos government is now busy lifting social distancing measures to boost the tourism industry’s summer profits and pay for its €140 billion bank and corporate bailout package. As a result, a “fourth wave” is widely expected that would lead to tens of thousands of avoidable deaths.

The PSOE-Podemos government in fact relied on Vox’s support in parliament to get its bailouts passed. Podemos has increasingly adopted Vox’s programme, whipping up the fascist anti-Catalan campaign, incarcerating Catalan politicians under fraudulent charges and seeking the extradition of former regional Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont. It also relentlessly intensified the persecution of migrants and denounced youth protests against its jailing of Stalinist rapper Pablo Hasél.

As for the WhatsApp chats where senior military officers said they were “good fascists” and called to “start shooting 26 million sons of b*tches” to “extirpate the cancer” of left-wing sentiment, Iglesias reacted by covering up this danger. In prime-time television, amid mass anger on social media, Iglesias brazenly insisted that nothing of any importance had been revealed: “What these gentlemen say, at their age and already retired, in a chat with a few too many drinks, does not pose any threat.”

In fact, it is nearly a year since Vox, reacting against mass strikes demanding a shut-down of non-essential

production across Spain and Europe amid the pandemic, began to conspire with sections of the army to prepare a coup. One of its principal aims, the officers' comments made clear, was to ensure that the government continued to implement a herd immunity policy.

Iglesias' sudden discovery of the threat of fascism is a contemptible manoeuvre, arising from the factional intrigues of the major Spanish bourgeois parties and growing working class anger.

Madrid regional premier Isabel Díaz Ayuso (PP) called snap elections in Madrid fearing an attempt by the PSOE to cut a deal with her current coalition partner, the right-wing Citizens party. A similar attempt by the PSOE had just failed in Murcia. Ayuso set elections for May 4, announcing plans for an alliance with Vox.

This comes only a few months after youth protests broke out in working class districts of Madrid against herd immunity policies dictated by both Ayuso and the PSOE-Podemos government.

A conservative daily *ABC*'s poll shows the PP with nearly 40 percent of the votes and 57-59 deputies, and Vox getting 14 to 16 deputies. The PP-Vox coalition would have an absolute majority in the 136-member regional assembly. Vox leader in Madrid Rocío Monasterio told the far-right daily *OkDiario* that "Vox is going to an election to rule and to lead the [regional] government," adding that PP "will have to reach an understanding with Vox, and I will have to do the same."

Vox's entry into government would be the first time a far-right party ruled in Spain since the 1978 fall of the fascist dictatorship set up by Francisco Franco. It would help rule Spain's richest and third-most populous region (6.6 million inhabitants), comprising nearly 15 percent of Spain's population.

Far-right rule in Madrid—which withstood a Francoite siege for three years during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), suffering tens of thousands of deaths, and was then a centre of fascist repression for four decades during the Francoite dictatorship—would have explosive consequences. The mass working class opposition to Vox and its policies would inevitably be directed as well against the PSOE-Podemos government.

In 2019, the entry of Vox in the Andalusian parliament, the first time in its history that it gained electoral representation, provoked mass protests across Spain. In recent weeks, mass youth protests erupted after the PSOE-Podemos government incarcerated rapper Pablo Hasél for over two years, on trumped-up charges.

Terrified at growing social opposition, Iglesias is trying

to lull it to sleep by nominally remaining outside and organising an impotent "anti-fascist" campaign based on identity politics. His move has been designed at the top levels of the state, with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's seal of approval. As Iglesias stated on the programme *El Intermedio*, Sánchez "is clear that we have to win Madrid, and we have to do that together."

So far, More Madrid, the right-wing split off led by Podemos co-founder Iñigo Errejón, has rejected such an "anti-fascist" alliance. Its candidate, Mónica García, railed against Iglesias for being a man, saying: "We women know how to stop the extreme right without being protected by anyone, we cannot add more spectacle and more testosterone to [PP leader of Madrid, Isabel] Ayuso's frivolity."

Many workers and youth—including among Podemos, More Madrid and PSOE voters—hate everything Vox stands for and despise the PSOE-Podemos' reactionary policies. They are looking for a way forward. It is critical that they not be railroaded by Iglesias and his political allies into the blind alley of a vote for a "left unity candidate."

The working class is making enormous political experiences regarding the bitter costs of opportunism and the rejection of revolutionary principles. One must recall how in the 1930s, Stalinist politicians—the forbears of Podemos—told workers they had to sacrifice their interests for an alliance with "progressive" sections of the ruling class against fascism during the 1930s. This led to historic defeats in Spain and across Europe. These lessons must be assimilated.

The working class needs its own party and programme. The way forward is the construction of sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and beyond, fighting to build a socialist and internationalist movement in the working class and prepare a political general strike against herd immunity policies and the threat of authoritarian rule.



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