

# Spanish social-democrats, pseudo left try to form pro-war, austerity government

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Two months after Spain's inconclusive July snap general election, Pedro Sánchez, the acting prime minister of the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government, was named to try to form a new coalition government with the pseudo-left Sumar Movement. Sumar is a pseudo-left electoral platform containing the pseudo-left Podemos party and the Stalinist-led United Left (IU).

It takes place days after the leader of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), Alberto Nunez Feijoo, and the neo-fascist Vox party failed to form a majority coalition. Feijoo received 172 votes, four short from the 176 necessary for a majority in the 350-seat parliament. Sánchez must win a vote before November 27. If he is unsuccessful, new elections will automatically be called.

For the last eight years, Spain has held five national elections. The collapse in electoral support since the 2008 economic crisis for the Spanish bourgeoisie's traditional parties of government, the PSOE and the PP, has destabilized capitalist rule. More recently, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine, mass strikes driven by growing anger with social inequality have pit the working class against the ruling PSOE and Podemos parties.

Sánchez, whose party won 121 seats, can count on 31 seats from its ally, Sumar, but would be 24 seats short of a majority. Sánchez is counting on the 7 votes of the Catalan Republic Left (ERC) and 11 from the Basque-nationalist parties EH Bildu and PNV. He also requires 7 votes of the pro-separatist Together for Catalonia (Junts).

In exchange for its support, Junts is demanding a new referendum on Catalan independence and the amnesty of 3,000 to 4,000 activists and voters tried over the previous 2017 referendum. Its leader, former Catalan regional premier and now EU Parliament member Carles Puigdemont, still faces arrest. In July, the European Union's General Court of Justice stripped Puigdemont's parliamentary immunity. He has lived in exile in Belgium

since 2017.

Sánchez has opened the door to an amnesty, but refused any referendum, asking Catalans to "turn the page on the situation."

In 2017, Sánchez backed the PP's deployment of 10,000 paramilitary police to crack down on the Catalan referendum and throw out Puigdemont's Catalan regional government. The crackdown left over 1,000 peaceful voters injured.

A possible amnesty is backed by powerful factions of the ruling class. Last week, *El País*, owned by Spain's largest media corporation, Grupo Prisa, suddenly advocated it, after ruling it out just weeks before. Its article titled "Twenty-two Constitutional Court rulings allow an amnesty to be granted" by journalist Xavier Vidal-Folch, a backer of the anti-Catalan campaign in recent years, wrote: "The decisions of the court of guarantees and more than thirty international treaties have recognised the validity of such a measure of pardon."

The pseudo-left Sumar plays a lead role in PSOE-Junts talks. Former Podemos speaker Jaume Asens has been drafting an amnesty law since August. The draft law, sent to Junts last week, would pardon "all actions or omissions of political intention linked to the objective of achieving the self-determination of Catalonia classified as criminal or administrative infractions that took place between January 1, 2013 and the moment of entry into force of this law."

Significantly, it would also amnesty police involved in the crackdown.

It is unclear whether the PSOE and Sumar will be able to secure the support of Junts and the ERC, as ERC and Junts are bitter political rivals in Catalonia. Both, however, have stakes in ensuring a PSOE-Sumar government is elected, as it is expected to keep pumping billions in EU bailout funds to the Catalan bourgeoisie and slashing social spending.

Sumar's pseudo-left allies are intervening to provide a progressive fig leaf to reactionary parties organizing the amnesty debate. Revolutionary Left, the former Spanish affiliate of the Committee for a Workers' International, claims:

“(C)hanges in the PSOE's policy and its turn in favour of amnesty have been imposed by enormous pressure from the streets. The immense protests of the years 2011 to 2015 throughout the country and 2016-2019 in Catalonia continues to cause political effects that force Sánchez to offer certain concessions on the left if he wants to remain in power.”

Similarly, the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT) aims to subordinate workers to Sumar, PSOE and the Catalan nationalists, calling on workers to demand a “total” amnesty, not a “limited amnesty.” It claims this would spark a broad debate on Spanish democracy. Its leader, Santiago Lupe, proposed calling “large mobilisations that respond to this wave of Spanish chauvinism by demanding a total amnesty for the secessionists and the rest of the fighters of Catalonia and the rest of the state ... to open a constituent process.”

The WSWS has consistently opposed the incarceration of the Catalan nationalists and activists who called for their release. PSOE and Sumar, however, are not defenders of democracy who will respond to pressure from below by moving to the left.

Indeed, they have ruled Spain for four years, imposing brutal attacks on the working class: pension cuts consolidating the retirement age to 67, below-inflation wage increases on broad layers of workers, and a labour law reform slashing workers' legal protections in the workplace. To break strikes, it has imposed draconian minimum services laws and deployed tens of thousands of police. If they would have wanted an amnesty, they could have passed it already.

The question raised by the current calls for an amnesty is: what has changed?

Like the pardons in 2021 of nine Catalan nationalists serving decade-long jail sentences over their role in the Catalan independence referendum, it is a pragmatic decision. It is dictated above all by the need to install a government to continue waging NATO's war on Russia in Ukraine, pumping billions of euros to Spanish corporations and banks from EU bailout funds, and trying to suppress mounting working class opposition to falling wages and inflation.

Last week, Sánchez hosted the summit of European officials in Granada to discuss war strategy against

Russia. It took place amid growing divisions and crisis over the conduct of the Ukraine war in Washington, as the US administration struggles to secure funding for it, while EU officials signal their firm support for further escalation. Sánchez made clear he backed escalation, promising to send new air defence systems and train thousands more Ukrainian troops to serve as NATO cannon fodder.

Should Sánchez form a new government, it will be committed to escalating NATO imperialist war abroad and war on the working class at home. The PSOE and Sumar have already pledged €24 billion in cuts over the next year, after having voted the largest military budgets in Spanish history. This foretells an explosive confrontation between the PSOE-Sumar government and the working class.

If elected, the PSOE-Sumar government will be the weakest since the end of the fascist Francoite dictatorship in 1978, ruling over one of Spain's most fragmented parliaments. It will require the negotiations with four parties outside government to pass laws. Sumar will also have to negotiate with all 13 parties within its platform, including Podemos.

The new government will be vehemently opposed by the PP and Vox, which denounce any talks with the secessionists as tantamount to treason. Two weeks ago, they organised a 40,000-strong protest in Madrid against any concessions to the Catalan nationalists. Yesterday, 50,000 protestors gathered in Barcelona called by anti-secessionist group Societat Civil Catalana, and backed by the PP and Vox. High-ranking active and retired military officials have reportedly signed a manifesto against amnesty.

The urgent task for the working class and youth is to build a political leadership and organizations of struggle that can oppose the reactionary policies of the PSOE, Sumar, and their pseudo-left periphery, as well as the plots of the openly fascistic ruling circles. This means founding a Socialist Equality Party in Spain as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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