

Spanish Socialists. Closing Ranks Around the Leader Won't Stop the Right

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The recent PSOE (social democratic governing party) Congress took place in a context of increasing international and geopolitical instability, as well as amid the media and judicial spotlight on the new shadow of corruption affecting PM Pedro Sanchez and those around him, particularly the former party number 2, José Luis Ábalos.

Given these conditions, the development of this congressional rally in Seville was predictable: maximum demonstration of closing ranks around the charismatic leader and his *Manual of Resistance*, as well as reaffirmation of the commitment to fully play the blackmail card (“the right and far-right are coming”) to discipline their partners in government and parliament. Through these means, Sánchez seeks to achieve his purpose of holding on to the Prime Minister’s residence Moncloa until 2027 and, despite poor poll predictions, win the next elections. As expected, there has been no hint of self-criticism regarding many of the policies developed in recent years, not even for their co-responsibility in the initial inaction during the tragic *DANA* catastrophe in Valencia, despite reproaches coming from various sectors, including some of their partners like *Compromís* and *Podemos*.

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Social-Liberal Rhetoric, Precarious Welfarism and Euro-Atlanticism

Looking at the Congress’s Framework Paper, titled “Spain 2030. An Advancing Socialism, a Spain that Leads,” it’s fair to acknowledge some signs of more radical rhetoric against the “mega-rich” in defense of “the middle and working class,” but few programmatic novelties. Indeed, the document begins by announcing four major challenges on the horizon of 2030, which sounds very distant in these times of reactionary acceleration: developing a different growth pattern and addressing the climate emergency (they would need to explain how the first and second can be compatible...); facing the transformation of the global order and, finally, responding to the “rise of authoritarian values and the ultra-international.”

It continues with an attempt to magnify the “impossibles we achieved” in the last stage (with labor reform, despite its limitations, in first place) and the announcement of “impossibles we will achieve” (with the project – difficult to implement with allies PNV and Junts – of constitutional protection of social conquests), to then move on to defining a country project with ten goals: the first of these (“A more competitive, fair and sustainable economy”) already sets the framework for those that follow:

reduction of working hours, quality education, housing for all, fighting inequality in all its forms, strengthened autonomous state, full democracy that confronts disinformation, vocation for European project leadership, support for the (false) “two-state solution in Israel and Palestine” and reinforcement of the EU’s “strategic autonomy” in defense matters under the pretext of the Ukraine war.

Along with the widely publicized measure of working hours reduction, whose concrete content remains to be seen, among the specific novelties that might draw attention are the creation of a “citizen seat” in Congress and the Senate for civil society representatives to intervene; voting rights from age 16 and the convening of deliberative Citizens’ Conventions; the prohibition of converting residential housing into tourist and seasonal accommodations, the creation of a state company for public housing development, and the requirement that mortgages and rents do not exceed 30% of salaries; the reform of the autonomous financing system (with a sufficiently ambiguous formulation to satisfy all the baronies...); or, finally, the repeal of the 1979 Agreement with the Catholic Church on cultural and educational matters...

Some of these promises sound like mere repetition of those included in previous Congresses, while the scant attention paid to (necro)migration policy stands out (only mentioning the need for “an immigration model that guarantees a constant flow”) or the absence of a fiscal policy that goes beyond a generic reference that large companies will be forced (how?) to share part of the scandalous profits achieved in recent years [1]. Not to mention the perpetually postponed repeal of the gag law and the official secrets law; or the democratic and urgent reform of judicial power (what happened to that announcement of democratic regeneration?); or the lack of specificity about what “deepening the process of state federalization” might mean; or, last but not least, the total silence on the Sahrawi people’s right to self-determination, confirming once again the PSOE’s complicity with the repressive Moroccan regime.

However, whatever the interest this framework paper might have had at the PSOE Congress, only the triumph of the misnamed classical feminists has transcended with their amendment aimed at preventing the inclusion of Q+ alongside LGTBI. This was achieved thanks to the lobby led by former vice president Carmen Calvo, and was finally approved in the plenary, though with a very low participation [2]. This decision represents a serious step backward in recognizing diversity, contributes to promoting transphobia, emboldens the right in their culture war, and distances PSOE from a position that has broad consensus in the bulk of the feminist movement; above all, among its new generations.

Fear of Internal Democracy

On the organizational level, the consolidation of a party model based on increasingly reinforced caesarism around the maximum leader has also become evident, as criticized by one of the few Socialist Left delegates who attended the Congress, Manuel de la Rocha Rubí [3]: according to his own observation, there has been a clear demonstration of “fear of democracy,” manifested even in the “refusal to debate management at the Congress, violating a basic democratic principle and a key article of our Statutes.” Total subordination of the party to the government itself has been installed; something that has become even more visible with the number of ministers who are part of the new Federal Executive Commission. Definitely, he concludes, “the Party’s position is set by the Government and not the other way around, not even with the possibility of mutual influence.”

The case of Madrid, with Juan Lobato’s forced resignation as PSM general secretary, regardless of one’s opinion about his behavior regarding the Díaz Ayuso’s partner case, is another clear example

of these practices, as Socialist Left of Madrid has justly criticized (“Forms matter!”) in face of the prohibition of meetings to establish any candidacy against the official one, led by current minister Oscar López.

So, definitively, under the maxim of making virtue of necessity, the triumph of a plebiscitary leadership model has been consummated, a leadership that only aspires to remain in government by making some concessions to its investiture allies in areas that don’t affect the hard core of economic policy dictated from the EU level, mainly from the European Commission and the European Central Bank.

Void on the Left

To these gloomy perspectives is added the tragic absence of political forces to the left of PSOE capable of building an alternative to the policies dividing popular classes practiced by the right, but also to Sánchez’s diminishing social-liberalism. Neither Sumar –increasingly adapted to the limits set by Moncloa and the EU– nor Podemos –despite its efforts to appear now hypercritical of a PSOE with which, nevertheless, it still aspires to govern– have credibility anymore to be references in the arduous task of recomposing a left willing to extract lessons from the cycle opened by 15M and the Catalan *procés* to offer a path of refoundation not subordinated to institutional politics.

Nor on the more social level do the leaderships of the major unions, CCOO and UGT, themselves subordinated to what the government dictates, appear today as the frame of reference for a recomposition of a workers’ movement willing to face an employers’ association and big capital increasingly prone to favor the reactionary bloc’s arrival to government.

However, the mobilizations for decent housing in practically all of the Spanish State’s territory –real expressions of a class struggle that directly threatens rentier capitalism– like the admirable solidarity response of the Valencian people and others across the State to the ecosocial catastrophe of the *dana*, as well as the different forms of resistance occurring in various sectors –such as in healthcare and education– or in solidarity with Palestine show hopeful signs that a new cycle of mobilizations from below and to the left might reopen in the coming period. It will be from these experiences that we must learn to seek new forms of confluence in the struggles and debates of renewed collective actors; and, with them, generate new initiatives that allow building a common political and social front, capable of facing the reactionary threat and accumulating counter-hegemonic potential from neighborhoods and workplaces. Only thus can we return to center stage the necessity of an ecosocial transition strategy and democratic rupture with this regime and the power bloc that sustains it.

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P.S.

[1] As Andreu Missé criticizes: “The fiscal reform carried out by the Government (PSOE and Sumar) and its partners is minimal. Rather, it seems a succession of patches. The agreement reached in Congress has approved the bank tax, the increase in capital income, hydrocarbons and tobacco. But

it has had to leave the tax on energy companies for a new law. And taxes on real estate companies (Socimis), private insurance, luxury goods and diesel, and VAT on tourist apartments have been ruled out,” “Bank and energy companies’ lack of solidarity”, *Alternativas económicas*, December 2024, 130, p. 3

[2] “The history behind PSOE’s amendments on LGTBIQ+ acronyms”, Ana Requena and José Enrique Monrosi, 3/12/24

[3] “Socialist Congress and criticism of management”, *eldiario.es*, 6/12/24

Footnotes

[1] 1

[2] 2

[3] 3