

Di Marga Ferrè - Last Friday, on 1 June, Pedro Sánchez, the Socialist Party's (PSOE) General Secretary, who is not even a member of parliament, was proclaimed the new president of Spain after winning a no-confidence motion against the conservative Popular Party (PP) government of Mariano Rajoy. Ten days before nobody would have even dreamed that this was possible.

## What happened then in those ten days?

In my opinion, it was a combination of three elements: a judicial sentence, a lesson learned from the recent political past, and a daring political move.

Let's go back two years, to 20 December 2015, the day of the first national election with Podemos and Ciudadanos, two new political parties on the ballot (the first left oriented and the second pro-neoliberal). The result was that no party could govern unless a difficult alliance was forged. The PSOE played a double game: on the one hand, it looked for an agreement with Ciudadanos and, on the other, with Podemos. It proved impossible. Podemos did not help matters by demanding they be part of the new government, with a ready-made proposal of their Ministries. IzquierdaUnida (at this time there still was no agreement with Podemos) tried to bring to the table all progressive forces in a last effort to avoid new elections, alas in vain. At the end of the day, Spain was without a government for nine months until the elections were held on 26 June. Little changed except for two things: an inter-right agreement between PP and Ciudadanos and a huge internal battle inside the PSOE between the old guard that wanted to support a right-wing government and Pedro Sánchez and his people who wanted to maintain a frontal opposition to the PP. The old guard won and Mariano Rajoy was elected president with the votes of Ciudadanos and the PSOE's abstention. Pedro Sánchez resigned.

Within this impasse, the question of Catalonia's independence arose, which this article has addressed. Using the fear of state disintegration, the right-wing parties (PP and Ciudadanos) have swept all social and economic problems under the carpet of 'the unity of Spain', which the PP has also used to silence the popular outcry against corruption.

### **Corruption**

On the 24 May a court sentence was pronounced in one of the most famous PP corruption cases. The surprise was not that there was a sentence but its harshness: 28 people connected to the PP were sentenced to a total of more than 350 years of prison. The sentence also proclaimed the PP to be an organization that received benefits from, and organized bribes for public contracts and which used this money to finance electoral campaigns. The country exploded with indignation - this was not another case based only on suspicions. A judge (very conservative, as most judges are in Spain and elsewhere) determined that the PP is a corrupt organization and that the declaration made by President Rajoy in court lacked credibility. It was a sentence that in essence declared we were governed by a gang of Mafiosi.

It was the moment, and Pedro Sánchez knew to read it. He set things into motion with a risky gambit: without consulting anyone, without any agreement, he announced a no-confidence motion to expel president Rajoy. Unidos Podemos (the left coalition made up of Podemos and IzquierdaUnida), having learned the lesson of 2016, immediately supported the motion unconditionally, without asking anything in return. The priority was to throw the corrupt right out. Ciudadanos, which had until that moment been growing in the polls, isolated itself when it merely called for new elections.

The PSOE has 84 MPs and Unidos Podemos 71. More support was required to arrive at the 176 needed for an absolute majority in the Spanish parliament. What was needed was the support of the right-wing nationalist Basque and Catalan separatists. And it is in that precise moment that Pedro Sánchez got it right: he negotiated nothing with them - he could not, for Socialist voters in Spain are profoundly anti-separatist. So, with Unidos Podemos's support, he bet everything on the reaction of the separatist parties - making them choose between supporting the motion or being the accomplices of a corrupt right-wing government that created a chaotic situation in Catalonia. It worked. At the very last moment, the Basque nationalists voted for the no-confidence motion, making Pedro Sánchez president of the Kingdom of Spain.

The political chess board was devastated in a week, leaving behind a political corpse, the PP, and a victim, Ciudadanos, which, voting in favour of the PP and thus of corruption, is now seen in the country as a fake party making far-right gestures. War is now raging within right-wing parties, which is always good news for the left and for the country. What must Macron be thinking of the support he gave to Ciudadanos, a party which today has made a fool of itself with a parliamentary speech full of hatred for the Catalan and Basque people at a moment when the country is crying out for dialogue and common sense to resolve our territorial problems.

**And what now?**

We do not know. Despite Unidos Podemos's offer to join a government, the PSOE will only form a minority Socialist government, but with a left turn. How left this turn will be cannot yet be determined, but the confrontation between the PSOE and Ciudadanos makes impossible the default class strategy of using Ciudadanos as a joker to always keep a right-wing party in any coalition government.

The majority of the population is very happy to see corrupt politicians thrown out of government, which now opens up a new period in Spain, although it is by no means clear that there can be any change in the economic sphere. But there is now an opportunity for Unidos Podemos to collaborate with the PSOE in parliament to guarantee a left turn on some issues. The PSOE is not a left party in terms of economic policy, but it defends some left values such as gender equality, non-discrimination policies, and public services. Although this is insufficient for leftists such as me, it is certainly a step in the right direction.

The example of Portugal is too close to ignore, and the fact that Pedro Sánchez needs Unidos Podemos's parliamentarians opens a window of opportunity, but we still do not really know how it will be used. What we do know is that it is a good thing to kick out a corrupt government - and that history is not fixed and unchangeable but is made by people.

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