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Spanish state

# Why the conservatives fell in the Spanish state

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**Mariano Rajoy, the conservative president of the Spanish state, was forced out June 1 after the parliament voted for a motion of censure (similar to a vote of no confidence) put forward by the biggest opposition party, the center-left Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), and supported by the left-wing Unidos Podemos and the nationalist parties Partido Nacionalista Vasco (PNV) and Partido Demócrata Europeo Catalán (PdeCat). PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez became the new president.**

**Rajoy, the leader of the conservative Popular Party (PP), was brought down after the PP was implicated in a corruption scandal for which several members were sentenced to prison in May. But the wider backdrop to Rajoy's downfall involves deepening social conflicts in the Spanish state, including the independence referendum in Catalonia late last year, which was violently repressed by the PP-led central government. The self-organization and mobilization of the Catalan people was squelched when the Spanish state imposed Article 155 of the Constitution, annulling the referendum results in favor of independence, and punished participants in the process, including elected Catalan political leaders.**

**Brais Fernández, an activist in the revolutionary socialist organization Anticapitalistas in Madrid and member of the editorial board of *Viento Sur* magazine, talked to Eva MarÃ-a about what led to the downfall of the conservative government and about perspectives for the Spanish left moving forward.**

**Eva MarÃ-a: Can you tell us, by way of introduction, what happened in the last two weeks that led to Rajoy's early dismissal?**

**Brais Fernández** In reality, what happened over the last two weeks is the consequence of events that have accumulated over the last two decades, and that have finally crystallized into a court ruling.

The Popular Party, a right-wing party founded by a former minister of fascist dictator Francisco Franco's regime, was convicted of corruption in the so-called "Gurtel case" trial. The ruling revealed a whole network of illegal funding that implicates the former party treasurer, as well as senior government officials, including former President Rajoy.

The PP is the most corrupt party in Europe, on a par with the old Italian Christian Democrats. Most of the former ministers of the government of José MarÃ-a Aznar "a loyal ally of George W. Bush in the war on Iraq, by the way" are being prosecuted for corruption.

This is the first time that an entire organization has been condemned as responsible for these cases. The situation was untenable.

**Eva MarÃ-a What is a motion of censure and how did it pass? Which parties were involved in this process?**

**Brais Fernández** A motion of censure is a parliamentary mechanism enshrined in the Constitution that allows a parliamentary group with more than 35 deputies to recall the head of the government and appoint a new one, all in one vote. An absolute majority is required to move the motion forward " in this case, 176 out of 350 members.

## Why the conservatives fell in the Spanish state

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This was the fourth motion of censure since the current constitutional system of 1978 was established after Franco's death, but the first to succeed.

This motion of censure was the second put forward during this legislature. Unidos Podemos had previously presented one that didn't move forward.

Last week's motion was presented by the PSOE. It was supported by the left (principally Unidos Podemos) and by the Basque and Catalan nationalist parties. These parties have many differences among them, but they hate Rajoy and the right wing, and the court ruling provided the occasion to unite against him.

### **Eva MarÃ-a: Who is Mariano Rajoy and what does the Popular Party represent?**

**Brais Fernandez** Mariano Rajoy is a lifelong politician who has spent his entire career occupying different positions in the Popular Party. He is a person without much charisma. He is discreet, a good parliamentarian, moderate in form, characterized by a timid and conservative style, in contrast to the usual hysterical tone of the right.

The truth is that everyone considers him to be a fool, but he has been able to push the whole neoliberal program forward and keep his party in power, despite the fact that new corruption charges were being brought against them every week.

The PP is the major party of the Spanish right wing. Like the Republicans in the U.S., they group together all the strands of the traditional right, but the strands are different: they are the heirs of Franco's regime, neoliberals, neoconservatives, Catholics, technocrats...It is a party with a strong social base, both in the state and in civil society.

However, in the last few years, another right-wing party has emerged to compete with them: Citizens [Ciudadanos]. Until now, Ciudadanos and its ultra-nationalist program was first in all the polls. It is strongly neoliberal, following Emmanuel Macron's style in France, but also capable of flirting with the new populisms emerging in Europe, such as the Italian Five Star Movement.

### **Eva MarÃ-a: Who is Pedro Sanchez? What level of popularity does he and the PSOE have with the Spanish people?**

**Brais Fernandez** Pedro Sanchez is the great survivor of Spanish politics. Four years ago, Sanchez was anointed as the main candidate of the PSOE by the old guard because they saw him as a puppet they could manage.

But he didn't accept this role. He was more ambitious, so the institutional apparatus dismissed him. He was forced to resign from all his posts in the party and in the parliament in 2016.

But now he has returned to office, winning the primaries for secretary general of the Socialist Party against the whole establishment, and he has managed to become president by winning a motion of censure. It's a kind of epic story. I think you in the U.S. could pick it up as a good HBO series.

We must remember that the famous indignados movement in 2011, also known as the 15-M Movement, fought against the PSOE. At that time, people shouted: "PSOE, PP, they're the same shit." In other words, it was a movement against the economic elites and their parties, and PSOE was a major target.

## Why the conservatives fell in the Spanish state

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Keep in mind that being “socialist” here has nothing to do with what it is in the U.S. Here in Spain, the socialists have been the most loyal followers of neoliberal politics, so left-wing opposition at the parliamentary level was left in the hands of parties from the Communist tradition.

Pedro Sánchez is no different in his ideology from the old socialist leaders, although he represents a new generation that is aware it needs new parties like Podemos to manage Spanish capitalism.

Sánchez hasn't yet managed to make the PSOE the great left-wing party it once was. I find it hard to believe that he will succeed at this, although I believe he could recover some support and govern in coalition with the left. He has generated some illusions among left-wingers, but he has also made it clear that he isn't going to break with the neoliberal economic framework.

**Eva MarÃ-a: What are the main factors influencing the outcome in favor of Rajoy's dismissal? Do you think that the events of October in Catalonia played a significant role in this latest development?**

**Brais Fernández** There is a deep national-territorial crisis in Spain, a sharp political crisis related to corruption, and a social crisis caused by the impoverishment of large sections of the working population.

There have been unequal and complex responses to each of these three crises: 1) a powerful independence movement in Catalonia; 2) court convictions for several corruption-related cases; and 3) major social mobilizations in response to the social crisis, led in the last stage by the feminist movement and pensioners.

In a way, Rajoy's government embodied the three crises. Hated by the Catalan independentistas for their role in the repression “remember that in Spain, there are many political prisoners and politicians in exile since October” with their party knee-deep in corruption charges and targeted as the primary champion of austerity, Rajoy and the PP have increasingly become more isolated and in crisis.

**Eva MarÃ-a: What is the relationship between the dominant Spanish politics and the Catalan question?**

**Brais Fernández** Bad. It's a taboo. The independence movement has majority support in Catalonia, but in the Spanish state, Catalans are treated as people without citizenship rights. Any party that wants to negotiate with them is immediately accused of being their accomplice.

This is a very serious case of political criminalization and loss of civil rights. Pedro Sánchez's government can ease this a little, but I don't think it will dare to be brave, and start a process of democratic dialogue with the Catalans. He is going to have very strong pressure from the right on this, and Sánchez has always bowed to them on this issue.

**Eva MarÃ-a: What can we expect from a PSOE government in coalition with the left and the conservative nationalists?**

**Brais Fernández** It's possible that the PSOE government will make some reforms that will consolidate it as a progressive force. But these reforms will be superficial because, to begin with, he will govern with budgets that were approved by the outgoing government of Rajoy.

When it comes to economic policy and the restructuring of society and power, nothing is going to change. But it can pursue a more advanced policy “without touching the fundamentals, such as the issue of Catalonia” in the field

## Why the conservatives fell in the Spanish state

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of civil rights, and with some concessions to the feminist movement, unions representing the most skilled sectors of the working class, and the elderly.

But he can do all of this without any radical transformation. He has already said it: the new government will respect all commitments to the European Union.

**Eva MarÃ-a: How is this experience being lived by the Spanish people? What has the general mood in the country been in the last few months? How has the role of Podemos manifested itself, and what are the implications of its involvement in this new government?**

**Brais Fernandez** The PP and the right were hated by so much of the population that there is a sense of relief.

I believe there are certain expectations that a new progressive cycle can be opened up. On the other hand, certain sectors have warned that we must not forget that the PSOE has always been the best ally of the financial powers, and that this is not going to change.

It seems to me a very necessary warning because there is a risk that the whole cycle begun by 15-M will end with a progressive restoration, where certain aspects change, but the fundamentals remain the same.

I think that, unfortunately, Podemos is helping to fuel that dynamic. On the one hand, they desperately want to enter the government. On the other hand, they lower expectations and downplay their social program.

They are no longer talking about nationalizations, as Jeremy Corbyn does in Britain, nor about the constituent process as in Bolivia. Now they are talking about stability and about demonstrating that the left can govern responsibly.

This obviously has an effect on the population, which, after years of mobilizations, is looking for a quick way out against the right.

It also has to do with historical factors. The civil war and the years of the Republic since continue to mark the collective political imagination. Whenever the left is in power, however moderate it may be, the right begins to overreact and generate a very exaggerated atmosphere of tension. This causes people on the left to retreat and defend the government against attacks by the right, instead of trying to overcome it and go further.

But be careful: An economic crisis is lurking and global financial turbulence can create a breeding ground for a worsening social crisis.

**Eva MarÃ-a: What are the main tasks of the left in the current political scenario in Spain? And what does Anticapitalistas propose as the way forward?**

**Brais Fernandez** My opinion is that the crises are far from over.

This government isn't our government, and I believe that the parliamentary left shouldn't support it unconditionally, or try to be part of it, but rather formulate demands around concrete issues that will improve the lives of working people at the same time as they strengthen social self-organization. There is a strong feminist movement, an upsurge in workers' strikes and a social base that knows that the PSOE always betrays expectations of change.

## Why the conservatives fell in the Spanish state

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There is a basis for continuing the struggle that began on May 15, but let's not deceive ourselves over expectations for a few ministries. The left must not contribute to bailing out a regime that is in crisis. It must take advantage of the chaos and weakness of social democracy to push for a radically transformative alternative.

It is also time to address the social sectors not represented in the new progressive framework. There are broad sectors of the population that are left out of the official discourse and the so-called economic recovery: the new precarious and urban working youth, women upon whose social reproduction the entire system depends, migrants, people from the deindustrialized areas, as well as the poor pensioners.

In a period when middle-class society is breaking down, progressivism and the official left offer only the fiction of returning to a beautiful past without any material basis.

A strong, confrontational policy should base itself on winning over these sectors, combining social unionism with a hegemonic social force constructed according to the plurality of subjectivities that collectively oppose neoliberalism. Spain can be a good laboratory for this.

Source [socialistworker.org](http://socialistworker.org).

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