PSOE gains from useful vote against the reactionary right

written by Jaime Pastor | May 1, 2019

With a turnout of more than 75%, the PSOE (Partido Socialista Obrero Español – Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) was the main winner (28.70% of votes, with 123 seats, as against 2016 when it obtained 85) against the PP (Partido Popular – Popular Party), which has entered an irreversible crisis (it has gone from 137 seats to 66, with 16.70%, while it did not obtain representation for the first time in the Basque Country and only has one seat in Catalonia), Ciudadanos (which rose from 32 to 57 seats with 15.86%, but did not overtake the PP and fell back in its original fiefdom, Catalonia) and Vox (which enters parliament with 24 seats and 10.26%, but below the expectations it had generated with its discourse of the Reconquista).

Pedro Sánchez managed to channel the cry of "No pasarán"" to the detriment of UP (Unidos Podemos), which went from 21.15% in 2016 to 14.31% and also, unlike Ciudadanos, has been especially affected by the electoral system's procedure of seat distribution, going from 71 seats to 42. In addition Sanchez won an absolute majority in the Senate (going from 43 to 121 seats) against a right (falling from 130 to 56 seats) that has traditionally dominated this institution, whose role had been revalued with the application of article 155 against Catalan autonomy after the days of September and October 2017.

The second conclusion to be highlighted from these results is undoubtedly the rise of ERC (Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya – Republican Left of Catalonia) which has gone from 9 to 15 seats, with 3.89% of votes, this being the first time that a pro-independence political force has become the biggest force in Catalonia in a general election. This is compounded by the rise of its Basque ally in the upcoming European elections, EH Bildu (which has gone from 2 to 4 seats, with 0.99% of votes), confirming the greater weight of sovereignist and republican leftist forces in the next parliament, although they are not going to be decisive to guaranteeing the investiture of Sánchez as president of the government.

The PSOE's triumph is completed with its achievement in the elections that were also held on Sunday in the País Valencià: it rises from 23 to 27 seats and, with the support of Compromís (17) and Podemos (8), has a majority to form a government over the three right wing parties (47 seats).

This new scenario is a very serious defeat of the PP and, above all, its leader Pablo Casado, whose radicalization of discourse to compete with Vox has not yielded the desired results and, instead, now opens an internal crisis of incalculable consequences a little less than a month from the municipal, autonomous and European elections of May 26, 2019. Resignations and defections to Ciudadanos are not ruled out in the next few days, following in the footsteps of Ángel Garrido, former president of the Community of Madrid, a region where Ciudadanos beat the PP.

The new correlation of forces in parliament allows Sánchez to obtain investiture by adding his votes to those of UP, the Basque nationalist PNV (Partido Nacionalista Vasco, which has risen from 5 to 6), Compromis (1) and the Cantabrian regionalist PRC (1), if not in a first in a second round of parliamentary voting, without having to agree with the Catalan independence movement (which includes Junts per Catalunya, which will have 7 seats) or with Ciudadanos.

This last formation will enter a new stage in which its leader, Albert Rivera, has already expressed his aspiration to become head of the opposition to the Sanchez government, all the more so in view of the coming electoral battles and the new setback that awaits the PP in them. It does not seem foreseeable, therefore, that in the short term there will be a turn towards a negotiation on their part with the PSOE but, on the contrary, a greater effort to wrest votes from the PP and Vox and to strengthen its support so as to enter government in large cities like Madrid and some Autonomous Communities.

Against this background we are seeing how Pablo Iglesias, despite the setback suffered, has offered to be part of a coalition government with the PSOE. An option that does not seem to be taken into account by Sanchez but which, if realized, would mean, given such an unequal correlation of forces between the two formations, moving towards strategic subordination to a party whose programmatic axis around the main cleavages – social, the national-territorial and political-institutional- that run through society continues to be that of a fundamental pillar of this regime – against which Podemos was born – and a faithful servant of the dictates of the Ibex 35 and the neoliberal troika.

Such an orientation, in the midst of the new electoral campaign that is soon to begin, would not serve at all to recover that part of the electorate that opted this Sunday for the vote for the PSOE or other formations on its left, but quite the opposite. A coherent position should be limited to supporting the investiture of Sanchez in parliament and reaffirming the strategic autonomy of a project openly prepared to confront the right wing parties and, above all, the threat of the penetration of Vox among certain popular sectors with an alternative program that from the first day is able to seek a confluence with the social mobilizations and popular empowerment around urgent demands whether they are social, feminist, ecologist, anti-racist, the defence of liberties or national-territorial. The latter, essential in the face of a plurinational reality that has become manifest again and again and before which the PSOE of Sánchez continues to yield to the pressures of the right and of its own baronies, even avoiding its already moderate federalist proposals in its electoral program and turning a deaf ear to the majority clamour in Catalonia against the farcical trial taking place in the Supreme Court (let’s not forget that four elected representatives of ERC and Junts per Catalunya are in jail) and in favour of a dialogue-based way out that goes through a referendum on their future.

The presence of a diversity of candidacies of popular unity in cities, towns and Autonomous Communities before the elections on May 26 should be an opportunity to seek greater social roots in neighbourhoods and workplaces that helps to move towards a process of recomposition of a left that, coinciding with the eighth anniversary of 15M, once again renews the spirit of indignation that saw it born while maintaining a clear horizon of rupture.

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