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Spain

Elections after the massacre...

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PP lies and the triumph of No To War: defeat for the PP, victory for the PSOE, and rise of the Catalan nationalist left

The results of yesterday's general election, held under the impact of the massacre of 11 March and the doctoring of information by the PP, represent a considerable defeat for the PP and success for the PSOE. Socialist Party leader Zapatero has finally managed to concentrate the "tactical vote" of a large sector of the electorate fed up with the PP's authoritarianism and warmongering and firmly determined to show its indignation at the political exploitation of the slaughter in Madrid by [outgoing prime minister] Aznar and [his heir designate] Rajoy.

But the PSOE could not have won without the mass mobilisations over the past year that built up a deep-rooted yearning for political change that was also to be seen in the protest actions last Saturday in many cities and, especially, in the increased turnout at the elections, particularly among the youth. The development of these mobilisations is essential if the hopes raised now are not to be thwarted.

Alongside this fundamental fact marking the beginning of a new political cycle, there was a spectacular increase in votes and seats for Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya, showing in this way that a broad segment of Catalan society supports a commitment to dialogue and recognition of the pluri-national character of the Spanish state. The United Left, on the other hand, suffered a major setback, due mainly to the pressure of "tactical voting", but also, in our opinion, to the wavering and contradictions in its electoral discourse and in its pursuit of distinct political profile that would make it appear as an alternative left before and during the electoral campaign.

The new parliament will therefore have a left majority and greater pluri-national representation, which straightaway poses the new challenges the government formed under Zapatero's leadership will be confronted with. Withdrawal of the Spanish troops from Iraq ought to be the first and immediate measure taken together with a commitment to set in train a "second transition" aimed at amending the constitution so that it recognises the pluri-national character of the state and establishing a new federal pact based on acceptance of the free decisions of peoples such as the Basque and the Catalan. Urgent steps also need to be taken to protect freedoms and democracy (especially in regard to the media), while in the economic and social spheres it will be necessary to make a clean break with "crony capitalism", privatisations and the increasingly casual nature of employment for most of the working population (including immigrants, by immediately granting permits to all those without them). The new government should also make a commitment to a progressive tax policy, guaranteeing quality public services and the right to decent housing, creating steady employment with rights based on such measures as the 35- hour week, and the immediate cancellation of the National Hydrological Plan and the closing down of all nuclear power stations.

However, the experience of dashed hopes following the PSOE's win in 1982 and the prevailing orientation of the party's current leadership, as expressed in the major planks of its election manifesto and symbolically reflected in the probable composition of the new government, should lead us not to place any trust in it. It will be necessary to keep up and intensify the demonstrations and actions taken by citizens in regard to the new government, supporting any step forward it takes, but maintaining the movements' independence and keeping up the pressure on it so as to gradually weld together a social and political anti-capitalist and alternative left, which is even more necessary today, if that were possible. For that very reason we believe the position forces such as the United Left should adopt in parliament is to support the election of Zapatero as head of the government and be willing to enter into one-off agreements on the issues mentioned above, but not be part of this government, as that would mean giving overall support to Zapatero's programme.

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The most immediate task is to turn the demonstrations on 20 March into an opportunity to condemn the war and the occupation of Iraq and demand the immediate return of the Spanish troops, the breaking off of all agreements with the United States and a struggle for another Europe in solidarity with the peoples of the "South", particularly the Palestinian people.