

On the nature of popular fronts

Ahead of the snap elections in France a new popular front (*Nouveau Front Populaire*) has been created in a surprisingly short time frame. Because of the haste of the situation a myriad of questions in regards to the policies and longevity of such a front have arisen. To me, it is both important and useful to compare this front with the original Popular Fronts in Spain and France in the 1930's.

The creation of all of these fronts is quintessentially the same - opposition to Fascism and other Far-right ideologies. In Spain it was the broad strengthening of conservative forces and the crackdown on left wing protests which in turn created the *Frente Popular* which managed to win the election in 1936 with its broad voter base starting from center-left parties and ending in communists and, crucially, even the anarchist CNT party. The celebrations from this victory were, of course, short lived because of the Nationalist uprising and the resulting civil war. In France the threat was more of an external one. After the First World War France was left scared of a hostile Germany and the Nazi rise to power as well as Italian Fascism created fertile ground for a united leftist bloc. The popular front there managed to create a government under Leon Blum. Whilst this government only lasted for about a year it did showcase the ability for Popular fronts to assume government positions.

The major difference between then and now is the existence of the USSR. It is highly plausible that the notion of the popular front came directly from the Kremlin, due to the fact that earlier the Kremlin had openly stated that social democrats and other moderate leftists are as big of an enemy as any Fascist and any strong alliance between communists and social democrats probably must have been approved by the Comintern. Such an overarching puppet master no longer exists and the forces of the left are free to do whatever they find useful. The European parliamentary elections were a clear sign of advances made by the far-right, which evidently has frightened everybody on the left. The list of member parties of the NFP clearly shows the incredibly broad net the popular front has cast, which is incredible considering the extremely short notice in which this agreement had to be made. Fear has always been the strongest uniting factor when there is no leader to follow. Without the Kremlin, leftist unity can only be achieved through fear of fascism.

The main issue that all popular fronts must face is the question of longevity. While the parties within this front may have some similar goals, the means of achieving these goals are hugely different. Anarchists and communists can rarely share the same room let alone govern together. This puts the government at risk of being unable to pass legislation due to the very fragile majority that it might have. Every party would like to see their program carried out although broad socialist goals and antifascist action can be strong enough to join them, but the concern is that an alliance can't live on these goals forever. This suggests that Fascist ideology is on fertile ground for victory in the long term as happened in Spain, where the popular front managed to fight inbetween themselves even when half of Spain was under control of their enemy.

It must also be noted that popular fronts could be a product of the peculiarities of certain types of democracies. In France every constituency sends the representative which gets the most votes in either the first or the second round, which means that these smaller socialist divisions would never be elected, even if they have a certain small percentage of the total vote, therefore they are inclined to participation in a united front rather than considering parliamentary coalitions after being elected in the parliament.