

Spain: Catalan Greens vote for war with Libya

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The Catalan Greens, Iniciativa per CatalunyaVerds (ICV), voted in favour of the war in Libya supported by the ruling Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) in Congress last month. The intervention was ratified by 336 votes in favour, three against and one abstention.

The ICV's sole Congress deputy, Nuria Buenaventura, declared that she supported the intervention for humanitarian reasons—albeit with “many reservations”. She said the pacifism traditionally linked to the Green movement was often “badly understood” and wrongly associated with “passivity”. Buenaventura declared that “there is a resolution by the United Nations and there is a population being massacred. The difference with Iraq is very clear. Does pacifism mean no to any intervention?”

The ICV's deputy in the European Parliament and a vice-president of the European Green Party, Raül Romeva i Rueda, declared that “under these circumstances, knowing the curriculum of the character [Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi] and refusing to assist passively another massacre such as those of Sarajevo, Srebrenica and Gorazde, we have decided to appeal to the United Nations so that it may fulfil its ‘responsibility to protect’.”

Romeva i Rueda was indicating that he had no differences with the head of the Green faction of the European Parliament, Daniel Cohn-Bendit, once the spokesman of the 1968 student movement in Paris, who was one of the first to support the Libya war. He was the driving force behind a resolution supporting the imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya, which was adopted almost unanimously by the parliament and prepared the way for the current war.

The ICV's support for the Libya war represents a significant shift for the party, which preached pacifism in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003. In line with its European Green counterparts, the ICV has transformed itself into an open appendage of its own state's imperialist ambitions. It has become a party of war.

Buenaventura's crocodile tears about a humanitarian disaster in Libya and the hypocrisy of the Western powers for their close relationship with Gaddafi were a cover for the ICV's right-wing shift. According to the daily newspaper *Público*, sources within the party claimed that there had been a

“discussion” before the vote that wavered from abstention to voting in favour. In no case did anyone propose voting against. The discussion can only have been about how a party hitherto associated with pacifism was going to present its U-turn to a public that has shown itself time and time again to be anti-war.

Since the vote, both the ICV and its coalition partner in Congress and in the Catalan parliament, the United Left (IzquierdaUnida, IU), which voted against the intervention, have tried to brush the vote under the carpet. There has been no public debate about it between or inside the two parties. There is not a single reference to Libya on the ICV's web site or any comment about the war vote on the IU's. The speed with which both parties moved to next business shows that there is no fundamental difference between them—only a disagreement over which section of the international bourgeoisie Spain should align with in order to advance its own national interests.

The ICV warned the Communist Party (PCE)-dominated IU that a failure to intervene in Libya was comparable to the West's refusal to come to the aid of the Spanish Revolution in 1936. A spokesperson declared, “the IU sometimes gets carried away by demagogy, by an infantile anti-Americanism. Iraq is not Libya. We have to stop this massacre. What is the alternative? Let's think of Spain 1936 for example. Today we see the non-intervention by the foreigners in the Spanish Civil War as a betrayal to the Republic, there is a certain parallelism.”

The “foreigners”, i.e., the Western powers, did not intervene in Spain because they supported Franco's fascist take-over in order to crush the working class. The struggle against Franco was defeated precisely because the Soviet Stalinists betrayed, by means of the brutal repression of its socialist opponents, a revolutionary struggle for the overthrow of Spanish capitalism. They insisted upon a Popular Front of all “democratic forces” against Franco, as part of an international campaign to suppress the socialist strivings of the working class and secure an alliance for the Soviet Union with the supposedly “democratic” imperialist powers. The ICV's humanitarian posturing over Libya—its own endorsing of the democratic bona fides of the Spanish bourgeoisie—is only a means of justifying direct support for the war aims of the oil-hungry imperialist powers.

IU European parliamentary deputy and PCE leader Willy

Meyer sought to counter the ICV criticism, by reference to support for an alternative imperialist bloc. The IU position “coincides with Brazil, India, Germany, Russia or China”, he said. “I do not see any demagogy in any way. Our position is very coherent.”

PCE General Secretary José Luis Centella mentioned the ICV only once—for having “involved us in the fourth non-declared war in the last 10 years.” His criticism had nothing to do with a principled anti-imperialism; quite the contrary, it was a plea to the major powers to use “peace mechanisms ... based on solidarity and cooperation”. IU spokesman Gaspar Llamazares called for “international isolation”, “blockades” and “embargos”.

The ICV is a fusion of Stalinism and the remnants of the 1968 peace and ecological movements. It has maintained a somewhat separate existence from Green parties elsewhere in Spain, which have come together in the Green Federation (Confederación de Los Verdes). However, both the ICV and Los Verdes are members of the European Green Party.

The ICV traces its origins back to the 1980s, when the Socialist Party (PSOE) government of Prime Minister Felipe González was in power. His administration represented a break by Spanish imperialism with the economic, political and social policies of Keynesian national economic regulation and welfare state measures. It attempted to claw back the limited concessions granted to the working in order to avert social revolution following the collapse of the Franco regime.

To offset declining profitability, Gonzalez set out to eliminate inefficient industries that had once been protected as national champions, open up the economy to international speculation and privatisation, causing the destruction of jobs in the textile, mining, iron and shipbuilding industries and to develop Spain’s role as an international power by joining NATO. His was to be a government of class war, not class compromise.

Gonzalez’s attacks were met by fierce resistance. In December 1988, 8 million workers (90 percent of the workforce) took part in a general strike, forcing the PSOE to withdraw its labour reform bill and to increase social spending.

The PCE diverted the movement away from a struggle against the government. It founded the IU in 1986, in an effort to turn workers away from a reckoning with the political and historical crimes of fascism and the betrayals of social democracy, towards bourgeois pacifism. In Catalonia, the PCE’s affiliate, the Partido Socialista Unificado de Cataluña (PSUC), founded the Initiative for Catalonia (Iniciativa per Catalunya, IC) on the same basis the following year in conjunction with the Communist Party of Catalonia (Partido de los Comunistas de Cataluña, PCC) and the Union of Left Nationalists (Entesadels Nacionalistes d’Esquerra, ENE).

In 1995 the IC and Els Verds (The Greens) formed an electoral coalition—the Initiative for Catalonia-The Greens (Iniciativa per Catalunya-Els Verds, IC-EV).

Within two years the IC had split from the IU. Some IC

members went on to create a new organisation that would become the IU’s Catalan section—the United and Alternative Left (Esquerra Unida i Alternativa, EUiA).

After the loss of six seats in the 1999 regional elections that left the party with five seats in the Catalan parliament, the IC-EV formally merged into the ICV in 2002. The new petty-bourgeoisie party presided over a mélange of identity politics, eco-politics, middle-class liberalism and pacifism under the cover of defending the “heritage and the history of the PSUC, the ENE and the labour movement”. It defined itself as “ecologist”, “socialist”, “feminist” and in favour of the right to “self-determination” of the Basque Country and Catalonia.

After the disastrous results of the 1999 elections the ICV gained some electoral success, particularly in local councils. It also won nine seats in the 2003 Catalan elections, enabling it to form a coalition government with the PSC (the PSOE’s Catalan section) and with the left-nationalist Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC). In the same year, the ICV and the EUiA got back together again and signed an electoral pact.

In 2006, the ICV gained its best results in the Catalan parliament. It took part in a new coalition government demanding that its then leader, Joan Saura, have the minister of home affairs portfolio, which had responsibility for the infamous regional police. In 2009 Saura defended police who were criticised by the Barcelona Law Association for the “extreme violence, typical of other times and intolerable in a democratic system” shown to students protesting university reforms. (See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BRhE50uuJ4g>)

The ICV has been able to play on its claims to be some sort of alternative to the established parties, even as it has functioned as an adjunct of the PSOE. But this ability to face both ways has its limits. The party has responded to the discrediting of the Zapatero government because of its austerity measures with a clear shift to the right. It is signalling to the Spanish bourgeoisie that, like its bigger counterparts elsewhere in Europe, it is ready to assume the political responsibilities of government should it be called upon—by supporting austerity and war.



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