

# Catalan separatism whipped up in Spain

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On September 11 official celebrations take place to commemorate the defeat of Catalan troops by Philip V of Spain in 1714. This year the Catalan elite wants to use the event to pressure Madrid to give the regional government greater control over taxes and to promote a divisive Catalonia-first policy amid rising social tensions.

For weeks the privately-owned Catalan media and the main public television, TV3, has been campaigning for the demonstration organized by the National Assembly of Catalonia (ANC)—a platform founded last March to lobby political parties to move towards independence under the slogan “Catalonia, new state of Europe.”

Òmnium Cultural, which is largely funded by the Catalan regional government to promote Catalan language and culture, is also one of the main participants. Their slogan is “We are a Nation. We decide.”

The Catalan parliament has replaced the coat of arms of Felipe V on the main facade of the building with the four bars of the Catalan flag. In one of Barcelona’s main tourist attractions, the Parc Güell, a huge secessionist flag was displayed by the youth section of the *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalan Republican Left of Catalonia-ERC). Its members distributed pamphlets in English saying, “We have a dream: Freedom for the Catalan Countries.”

The main parties participating are the separatists of ERC, *Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència* (Catalan Solidarity for independence), *Reagrupament* (Regrouping) and *Candidatura d’Unitat Popular* (Popular Unity Candidatures).

Members of the ruling coalition party in Catalonia, *Convergència y Unió*, which is not a separatist party and has historically called for autonomy within Spain, will attend. Recently the party has evolved publicly towards separatist positions.

Other parties like the *Partit Socialista de Catalunya*

(Socialist Party of Catalonia, the Catalan section of the Spanish Socialist Party) and *Inicitaiva per Catalunya Verds* (ICV, Catalan Green Initiative)—which is in coalition with Stalinist *Izquierda Unida* (IU, the United Left) in the Catalan and Spanish parliament—are also taking part.

In Catalonia the secessionist project had little popular support until recently. In 1988 support for independence accounted for just 13 percent of the Catalans. Between 1990 and 2000, this rose to 20 percent. This grew after 2005, after the Constitutional Court ruled that half of the new Statute passed by the Catalan parliament was null. After 2010 almost 24 percent of Catalans (one in four) were for independence, and a recent survey by the *Centre d’Estudis d’Opinió de la Generalitat* showed that 51 percent would vote in favour of separation from Spain.

In the Basque Country, snap elections have been called for October, where the separatist party Bildu and the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) are leading the polls. Bildu took 25 percent of the Basque vote in the last local elections, making it the second force.

In the rest of Spain, support for recentralization of the state—substituting for a structure divided into regions—has grown from 25 percent to 40 percent.

These tensions could be seen recently when Àlex Fàbregas, a Catalan field hockey player in Spain’s Olympic team, stated in an interview, “I feel Catalan... I do not feel the same way listening to the Spanish anthem as I do listening to [the Catalan national anthem] Els Segadors”.

He received at least one thousand offensive messages from Spanish nationalists, such as “Àlex Fàbregas, I want you dead”, “We should kill him slowly, to make him suffer” or “Gas chamber for Àlex Fàbregas”.

Amid the worst economic crisis since the 1930s the ruling Catalan elite, which has so far imposed three austerity packages totaling over 5 billion euros on

education, health care and social services, is using nationalism as a smokescreen. It claims that without Spain the government would not need to impose cuts, while supporting every austerity package imposed by the PP government in Madrid. The ruling Catalan party also agreed with the central government to reduce the budget deficit to 0.14 percent of GDP by 2018, moving the timetable forward by two years.

The regional government has recently asked central government for a 5 billion euro bailout from the Regional Liquidity Fund (FLA), the 18 billion euro body set up to finance troubled regions. Artur Mas, the president of the regional government, demanded that no “political conditions” be put on the table, because “the money is Catalan money.”

Meanwhile the PP, the heir of the Francoist National Movement, is seeking to increase its powers by exploiting the budgetary crisis facing Spain’s regions. Last March it implemented a new budget stability law, allowing it to force all regions to comply with deficit reduction goals. The law also allows central government to take direct control of regional finances if these goals are not met.

Both the Spanish and Catalan elite agree that the working class must pay for the crisis and both the PP and CiU have repeatedly voted in favour of slashing pensions, education, wages and labour reforms.

Those nominally left parties like Solidaritat, Esquerra, ICV and CUP and the youth organization of Arran who call for the separation of Spain and are playing along with the Catalan bourgeoisie are exposing themselves as anti-working class.

CUP and Arran call for independence and socialism in the “Catalan countries”. These include, apart from Catalonia, the regions of Valencia, the Balearic Islands and the western strip of Aragon, Pyrénées-Orientales in the South of France and Andorra. They never explain how, if socialism was never built in the USSR which occupied one sixth of the world surface, this would be done in a mini-state in the north-east of the Iberian peninsula, or how the working class should respond to the inevitable military response of Spain and France to such a move.

These parties, like so many others of their ilk, is composed of a privileged middle class layer that aims to create a mini-state that could be made more attractive for the global corporate elite through tax cuts

and stepped-up exploitation of the working class.

Catalan nationalism serves only to keep workers politically demobilised and to prevent them from advancing their own independent interests in a unified struggle. Marxism seeks the very opposite: the unification of the world’s working class irrespective of skin colour, language, nationality or creed.

Under conditions of social-counterrevolution spearheaded by the Spanish bourgeoisie and the Troika (the European Union, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund), the working class requires the building of a new international political party to take forward the revolutionary overthrow of Spanish capitalism and the European Union and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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