

The dead-end of Catalan independence

Part two

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This is the conclusion of a two-part article. Part one was published November 1.

In the present period, the development of the globalisation of production has, as analysed by the International Committee of the Fourth International, provided “an objective impulse for a new type of nationalist movement, seeking the dismemberment of existing states. Globally-mobile capital has given smaller territories the ability to link themselves directly to the world market. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have become the new models of development. A small coastal enclave, possessing adequate transportation links, infrastructure and a supply of cheap labour, may prove a more attractive base for multinational capital than a larger country with a less productive hinterland.” (See, “Globalization and the International Working Class: A Marxist Assessment”)

During the 1980s and 1990s, the ruling Catalan Convergence and Unity party (Convergència i Unió—CiU) government was headed by Jordi Pujol, who in 1960 had been sentenced to seven years in prison for organising the singing in public of the banned Catalan “Song of the Flag” (Cant de la Senyera). Released early, Pujol set about “building the country”, aiming for a federal Spain that would recognise Catalonia “as a country.”

As president of the Generalitat, from 1980 to 2003, he made agreements with any party that was in government, whether the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) or the Popular Party (PP), to extract economic concessions from Madrid. Such was his role during these years that he was named “Spaniard of the Year” by the patriotic and monarchist newspaper *ABC*.

In the 1990s, the European Union—the world’s largest single market—was established to compete with the United States, providing a common currency and the basis for expanding into Eastern Europe. With the rise of the cheap labour platforms of China and India, the European ruling elite set about systematically lowering the living standards of the working class and slashing social expenditures to enable European corporations to compete in the world market. Pujol was one of the main Spanish political leaders, along with then-PP Prime Minister José María Aznar, who reassured EU leaders that Spain would meet the strict Maastricht criteria for fiscal discipline and liberalisation of the economy.

In the 1999 elections, the CiU lost its absolute majority in the Generalitat, but Pujol was re-elected president with the votes of the PP. The deal involved the CiU dropping its demands for further

autonomy and a new fiscal pact. The main beneficiary of the rising anti-government sentiment was the PSOE’s sister party, the Catalan Socialist Party (Parti Socialist de Catalunya—PSC), which promised limited social reforms.

The loss of the CiU’s absolute majority was openly acknowledged as a threat to the stability of Spain. An editorial in the right-wing newspaper *El Mundo* warned, “The old peripheral moderate nationalisms are adrift in Spain today. Until recently, leaving to one side some of their occasional strident noises—never too serious—the two major forces of Catalan and Basque nationalism, CiU and PNV, had played the very estimable role of restraining and channelling the centrifugal tendencies existing in their respective communities in a democratic way. Regardless of the higher or lower sympathy anyone had with their perspective, what is undeniable is their efforts to put it forward on the basis of coexistence and good sense. But the last period is bringing forward very disturbingly different tunes.”

As Pujol stated in a recent interview in the *Financial Times*, “Until the 2000s, we tried to combine a policy of national and linguistic identity, but to project this within the Spanish framework. ... We made an important contribution to establishing stability in the transition [to democracy] in Spain.”

In this period, the Spanish economy grew between 3 and 4 percent a year, twice the European average, making the country the world’s eighth-largest economy. It was during this time that the Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya (ERC) began advocating separatism, arguing that Catalonia was financing the poor agricultural regions of southern Spain through taxation. In the 2003 regional elections, the ERC saw its share of the vote rise to 16.5 percent, almost doubling its seats to 23. It entered into a coalition government with the PSC and the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV—a coalition of middle class “lefts”, Greens and Stalinists), ending 23 years of CiU control.

A new statute passed in 2005 by the Catalan government giving it more control and pronouncing Catalonia a “nation”, albeit one within Spain, was watered down by the national PSOE government of Prime Minister José Luis Zapatero, which sought to preserve the general interests of the Spanish bourgeoisie while making unavoidable concessions.

The PP attempted to topple the Zapatero government, mobilising forces such as the Church, the Association of Victims of Terrorism, and elements within the military against moves toward peace with the Basque Homeland and Freedom party (Euskadi ta

Askatasuna—ETA) and the new Catalan statute. Boycotts against Catalan products were organised. The statute and the rule that Catalan language teaching took precedence in public schools were taken to the Constitutional Court. The right-wing media portrayed Spanish-speaking people as being persecuted in Catalonia.

In 2010, the Constitutional Court declared that half of the statute was unconstitutional, and the linguistic model in schools was declared illegal by the Supreme Court. This fuelled Catalan nationalism.

New parties such as Popular Unity Candidatures (Candidatura d'Unitat Popular—CUP); Catalan Solidarity for Independence (Solidaritat Catalana per la Independència)), founded by former Barcelona Football Club president Joan Laporta; Realignment for Independence (Reagrupament Independentista); and the youth organisation Arran were formed—arguing that Catalonia would be better off without Spain. Even Pujol complained that Catalonia could “no longer hope for anything from the Spanish state.”

The ex-left parties, including En Lucha, Revolta Global, and El Militante, have seized on the large numbers on this year's September 11 demonstration to step up their own calls for separatism. They describe the call for independence as a “just” and “democratic sentiment”, which they attribute to the working class. They oppose all efforts to break the political influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces over the working class, claiming instead that national separatism will provide a new basis for “socialism”. In this way they tie the Catalan working class to the bourgeoisie and write off any possibility of a united struggle of the working class of Spain and internationally for the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

In “It's Time to Call for a Referendum on Self-Determination”, the British Socialist Workers Party's sister organisation En Lucha declares, “We, as anti-capitalists, conceive of the Spanish state as a tool of class domination and we have no interest in its unity. We defend the independence of the Catalan countries with the prospect of weakening the retrograde Spanish State, based on denial of social and national rights.”

En Lucha wants the strengthening of nationalism in Catalonia to stimulate the nationalist movement in adjoining Catalan-speaking areas of Spain and France. It foments nationalism where such sentiments are weak or non-existent. In Andalusia, it calls for the “right for self-determination of the people, against the underdevelopment of Andalusia, for an agrarian reform and the recovery and enhancement of many positive aspects of the Andalusian culture.”

In the 2010 Catalan regional elections, En Lucha campaigned in favour of a Catalan Republic in the From Below (Des de Baix) coalition, alongside Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA), the Spanish section of the Pabloite United Secretariat, whose roots go back to the 1953 split from the Fourth International led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel.

IA's Catalan section, Global Revolt—Anti-capitalist Left (Revolta Global—Esquerra Anticapitalista) calls for an immediate referendum in its statement “After 11-S: The Catalan Republic is the future. No to cuts!”

The September 11 demonstration is described as the start of the

process which will “lead to the charter of a Catalan Republic that, from its own sovereignty, decides which links to have with the rest of the peoples of Europe and the world.”

To cover its embrace of the creation of innumerable capitalist mini-states and the splitting of the working class, IA, like En Lucha, advises the Catalan bourgeoisie to put more “social content” into calls for independence. If not, “there is a risk that the demagoguery of the PP and Citizens [a right-wing Catalan party] will advance in more sectors of Catalan society, and the working class will be less identified with the national call, polarising working class neighbourhoods in the national conflict.”

So, according to IA, the way to oppose national conflict is for workers to become more nationalist! It has called for a vote for the bourgeois CUP on November 25, claiming it is “presenting a program of rupture and social change and some candidates clearly more committed to social struggles.”

El Militante, the former Spanish section of the International Marxist Tendency, uses the September 11 demonstration to prop up the union bureaucracy. It acknowledges that “the trade unions and the left parties have not been able to lead the way in the struggle against the attacks and cuts, and in this way, in the absence of alternatives, this has been covered in part with the desire for independence” and that “the leaders of CCOO and UGT [trade unions]... defend key points like the fiscal pact and the demonstration”. But they go on to claim that now, due to the mass support for independence, “the unions will be forced to call for a struggle” and that “the Catalan working class will respond forcefully and with rage and will go far beyond rejecting the cuts: they will question the whole capitalist order.”

The championing of separatism by the ex-lefts in the name of self-determination ignores the experiences of the Spanish and international working class with bourgeois nationalist movements.

The most tragic experience was Yugoslavia, where ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and communalist movements encouraged a fratricidal war that was aimed at bringing the Balkans and Eastern Europe firmly into the orbit of the imperialist powers, who backed them to the hilt and rained down bombs on Belgrade. Today, the working class lives in ethnically divided states, subject to imperialist domination and increasing social misery, which serve, in turn, as a lever to drive down the living standards of workers in the rest of Europe.



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