

Catalan nationalist parties set date for independence referendum

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The ruling *Convèrgencia I Unió* (CiU), the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the former Stalinist Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV), and the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidates (CUP) have agreed to hold a referendum on independence from Spain on November 9, 2014. These forces hold 88 seats in the 135-member Catalan Regional Assembly.

The first question to be posed in the referendum is: “Do you want Catalonia to be a state?” Should the respondent answer “yes,” he or she will then be asked, “Do you want Catalonia to be an independent state?”

Regional President and CiU leader Artur Mas thanked the parties for their “generosity and sense of state,” adding, “This is historically very far-reaching... The date is very specific--November 9, 2014. We are thus holding to our commitment for the consultation to take place in 2014. The November 9 date allows us to ask the question with success. There will be time to guarantee the legal framework and democratic procedures.”

Mas concluded by appealing to Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, the leader of the right-wing Popular Party (PP), stating, “We’re waiting now for the Spanish state to respond to this solid majority and a public that wants to vote.”

Seven weeks before the date of the Catalan vote, on September 18, Scotland will be holding its own independence referendum.

The PP and the opposition social democratic party (Socialist Workers Party—PSOE) have reacted by ruling out the holding of a referendum on Catalan secession.

In a joint news conference with European Council President Herman Van Rompuy, Rajoy declared, “As prime minister I have sworn to uphold the constitution and the law and, because of this, I guarantee that this referendum will not happen. ... Any discussion or debate

on this is out of the question.”

Rajoy did not explain how he will prevent the referendum from being held, saying it is “not my place as prime minister to discuss what the government intends to do.”

Justice Minister Alberto Ruiz-Gallardon likewise told journalists, “The poll will not be held.” The leader of the PSOE, Alfredo Pérez Rucalbaba, said that “Mas... is leading Catalonia down a blind alley.”

Spain’s fourth largest party, Union, Progress and Democracy (UPyD), calls for regional powers to be handed back to the central state. Its leader, Rosa Díez González, called on the PP to reintroduce prison sentences for those who promote secessionist referendums. This penalty was originally introduced under the PP government of José María Aznar (2000-2004) to counter secessionist plans by the Basque region, but was later removed under José Luís Zapatero’s PSOE government.

Catalan separatism has gained wider popular acceptance in the recent period. Latest polls show that independence is favoured by 50 to 57 percent of the Catalan population, compared to 34 percent in 1996, with those against ranging between 18 and 30 percent, and 10 to 25 percent undecided.

The growth of Catalan nationalist sentiment is the result of the betrayals by the trade unions, supported by the pseudo-left parties, of repeated attempts by the working class to oppose austerity. The unions have diverted working class opposition into token protests and ineffective one-day general strikes before agreeing to a raft of austerity measures, including wage cuts and labour and pension counter-reforms. In the absence of a revolutionary socialist alternative and leadership, opposition has been channelled behind a separatist agenda whose function is to split the working class.

The PP and the PSOE, along with the main pillars of the state, including the Constitutional Court and the army, have fomented national hatred of Catalans across Spain. Members of the army regularly call for intervention in Catalonia to prevent a referendum; the political parties repeatedly point to the privileges of the Catalan region compared to others; and the Constitutional Court expressed its opposition in 2010 by revoking whole sections of the Catalan Statute of Autonomy approved in 2006.

Separatism has also been fuelled by attempts to restrict the use of the Catalan language. During the drafting of the current education law, which imposes limits to Catalan in schools, PP Minister of Education José Ignacio Wert declared in Congress, “Our interest is to Spanishize Catalan students so that they feel proud of being Spanish.”

The CiU and ERC have no disagreements with the main Spanish parties on the need for austerity. In fact, they have led the way. Since the beginning of 2012, the CiU government, supported by the ERC, has approved unprecedented cuts, including €3.4 billion in health care, €2.5 billion in education, €758 million in social protection, and €433 million in administration and general services. The CiU also agreed with the central PP government to speed up the timetable for cuts by two years in order to reduce Spain’s budget deficit.

Behind the referendum deal was the ERC’s support for the CiU’s 2014 budget, which includes further austerity measures. So far, the ERC has rejected becoming a formal part of the Catalan government, instead insuring the stability of Mas’s presidency from the sidelines.

Both parties have claimed that cuts would not be necessary if Catalonia, the richest region in Spain, was independent and no longer had to “subsidise” its poorer neighbours.

The CiU’s claim that self-determination is a democratic right of the Catalan people is a hollow pose by a party that is supporting the new Citizens Safety Law, which drastically curtails freedom of speech and assembly by imposing huge fines and jail sentences. (See: “Spanish government clamps down on public protests”)

During a debate in parliament on the draft law, CiU Deputy Feliu-Joan Guillaumes i Ràfols defended the need to reform the old laws on the right to protest

because of “repeated offences” by individuals involved in protests. It is in Catalonia that the riot police have been the most brutal in recent demonstrations.

Among the most aggressive promoters of separatism are the pseudo-left parties. They represent a privileged middle class layer which aims to create a mini-state that could be made more attractive to the global corporate elite through tax cuts and stepped-up exploitation of the working class.

Popular Unity Candidates (CUP) promote a brand of linguistic nationalism that seeks to create a “greater Catalonia” composed of territories where Catalan is spoken, such as Catalonia, Valencia, the Balearic Islands and the western strip of Aragon in Spain, Pyrénées-Orientales in the south of France, and the eastern Pyrenees micro-state of Andorra.

En Lucha, Izquierda Anticapitalista and Clase Contra Clase are all supporters of the referendum. They work deliberately to tie the working class to bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces by claiming that national separatism will provide a new basis for socialism by breaking the foundations of the Spanish state.

There is nothing progressive in the creation of new capitalist mini-states. Catalan nationalism serves only to keep workers politically demobilised and prevent them from advancing their own independent interests in a unified struggle.

The opposition of genuine socialism to Catalan nationalism does not imply any diminution of its complete opposition to the Spanish capitalist state and the “unity of the Spanish nation.” Marxists seek to unite the working class throughout Spain and throughout the world, irrespective of skin colour, language, nationality or creed, in the struggle to overthrow capitalism and the nation state system.



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