

Spain: Catalan pseudo-left intensify pro-independence agitation

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The possibility that the largest party in the Catalan coalition government, the Convergence and Union party (CiU), might back-down from its commitment to a referendum on independence on November 9 has led to intensified separatist agitation by pseudo-left nationalist organizations.

Last month, senior CiU figures suggested the referendum might be shelved if Spain's Constitutional Court ruled it unconstitutional. One told *El País*, "In this scenario, we won't go to the polls, because it would be too easy for our opponents," and so the party was "already exploring other possibilities."

Like their co-thinkers in Scotland such as the Socialist Workers Party, the Scottish Socialist Party and the Radical Independence Campaign, the pseudo-left in Catalonia attempt to give a progressive fig-leaf to a reactionary nationalist movement. In Scotland they act as foot soldiers for the Scottish National Party; in Catalonia for the CiU and its coalition partner, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC).

A typical example is Josep Maria Antentas, a leading member of the Pabloite Anticapitalist Left (IA) and the author of a recent *Público* article, "11-S and 9-N: the Moment of Truth". "11-S" refers to September 11—the date of huge demonstrations over the last couple of years commemorating the defeat of Catalan troops by King Philip V of Spain in 1714. "9-N" refers to the planned date for the referendum.

Antentas declares that the coming months "for better or worse" could lead to an "irreversible" break with the institutional framework created in 1978, after the end of the fascist dictatorship, "or they may represent the epic collapse of the process begun in 2012, leaving behind a legacy of unparalleled cynicism and frustration."

The process that Antentas refers to is the CiU's declaration in favour of independence in place of its traditional calls for greater autonomy. All along the aim

of the Catalan ruling class has been to transform Catalonia, which is responsible for 18.6 percent of Spain's GDP, into a low tax, cheap labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations. The corporations in Catalonia also want to end the subsidies its tax revenues provide to the poorer regions of Spain. At the same time, the ruling class has attempted to divert the explosive social tensions in Catalonia resulting from the imposition of the severest austerity measures in Spain, which have lead to the region being dubbed the "laboratory of cuts."

Antentas' claim that these parties in anyway seek to break the "1978 framework" is a fraud. The CiU, ERC and the other main promoter of the "right to choose", the Green Initiative for Catalonia-United and Alternative Left (ICV-EUiA), have been among the main props of the post-Franco establishment.

Antentas continues by describing how after the demonstrations in 2012 and 2013 and the Catalan parliament's approval of the Law of Referendums, it is necessary to "hold fast to a democratic disobedient movement that defends the sovereignty process and wears down the state..."

Like a lawyer advising his client, he writes: "To abide by the Constitutional Court, as it seems to be the will of [Catalan first minister and CiU leader, Artur] Mas... would be a strategic error of the first order. Given the evidence... the left forces should become the main supporters of the referendum. In the moment of truth there should be no doubt about who defends to the end the right to decide."

Antentas portrays the balkanisation of Spain as something inherently progressive. The defence of the unity and independence of the working class has nothing to do with his politics.

As Spanish workers are suffering massive unemployment, wage cuts and impoverishment, the IA and similar organizations are stepping up their campaign

to use the working class to bolster wavering factions of the Catalan ruling elite.

Antentas claims he is not a nationalist, saying, “The drive to defend the referendum should not be confused with the mantra of patriotic unity that reduces all social contradictions to the national question and serves to break the resistance to austerity policies.”

But this sentence comes one paragraph after he advises the Catalan National Congress (ANC) to press ahead with separatism, with or without the support of Mas. The ANC, created in 2012, calls for an independent Catalonia within the European Union with the euro as its currency and a Catalan army integrated into NATO. This would entail mass austerity to comply with the conditions imposed by Brussels and an increase in defence spending to integrate itself in NATO and participate in its imperialist adventures.

Antentas is very conscious that many workers oppose the Catalan nationalist project, so he advises the separatists to market it in a better manner. He states that, “secessionism without social content is incapable of connecting with an important part of Catalan society with popular origins and workers less identified with Catalanism.”

The academic Antentas, supposedly an expert in the field of globalization at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, ignores how the advent of global production, in which every country’s economy is integrated into a greater whole dominated by huge transnational corporations and banks, has completely undermined all national reform projects. A Catalan state would seek to establish more direct relations with the major banks, corporations and speculators by offering to increase exploitation by attacking wages and working conditions, destroy or privatise social services and cut corporate taxes. At the same time, independence would mean greater barriers between Catalan workers and their class brothers and sisters in Spain and throughout Europe.

Antentas tries to cover for the growth of Catalan nationalism by claiming that, “those who call for independence do so in the majority of cases because this is synonymous with more democracy and more equality.” This is a lie. The fact that Catalan separatism has gained wider popular acceptance is a result of the betrayal by the trade unions and nominally “left” parties—the Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) and United Left (IU)—of the repeated attempts by the working class to oppose austerity. Demoralisation and confusion have been exploited by the separatists who have repeatedly claimed

that an independent Catalonia would not have to impose cuts.

Antentas says that the crisis facing the official Catalan parties and the possibility of independence opens the way for a regroupment of various fake-left groups with other forces such as the Constituent Process led by the nun Teresa Forcades and the ATTAC economist, Arcadi Oliveres. “For the first time in decades, those of us who not only want a political change but also a different social and economic model have the chance to play an important role in Catalan politics,” he says. In other words, independence will guarantee them a privileged position in the new Catalan state.

Antentas ends his separatist polemic by stating that the referendum is not “simply a Catalan affair.” Rather, he insists, it would be “a fabulous opportunity to strike a blow to the battered ship of the Transition. [...] If [Popular Party (PP) Prime Minister Mariano] Rajoy loses this arm wrestle, his authority throughout the [Spanish] state will be weakened. The sense of shipwreck will be generalized...No one knows what will happen in the frontal collusion between the Spanish and Catalan institutions... But a shake like this one can be nothing good for the current battered regime.”

Antentas makes no assessment of the Rajoy government’s determination to prevent a referendum being held or the real possibility of a military or police intervention. The pseudo-left is fomenting conditions where the government will have the perfect pretext to impose a crackdown on the working class, which due to the heavy promotion of nationalism will be severely weakened and divided.

The only progressive response to the crisis of the nation state system is to bring an end to all national divisions by adopting the perspective of socialist internationalism. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) calls for a struggle against globally organised capital, not the offering of corporate tax incentives. We are for the overthrow of Spanish imperialism and its state apparatus, not the creation of a new repressive state in Catalonia.



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