

Spain's government denounces Catalan referendum

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Artur Mas, regional president and leader of the ruling party in Catalonia, *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Union-CiU), has signed a decree allowing a referendum on independence on November 9. This comes after the “No” vote in the Scottish referendum and the mass demonstration in Barcelona on September 11, the Spanish region's national day.

Mas signed the document using a Catalan-made fountain pen in room of *Verge de Montserrat*, reserved for “great occasions”, in the building of the Catalan government. He was surrounded by all the parties that support the referendum. Afterwards he left the building to greet hundreds of people in one of Barcelona's main squares, the *Plaça de Sant Jaume*. Only the Catalan public television TV3 was allowed to follow the whole ceremony and broadcast it live.

The decree includes the two questions that will be asked in the referendum: “Do you want Catalonia to be a state?” If the answer is affirmative, the next question is, “Do you want that state to be independent?”

The reaction of the Spanish government was immediate. Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Saénz de Santamaría held a press conference in which she reiterated that the government would not allow the referendum to take place “because it is not constitutional ... it is the government's job to ensure that the law is not broken.”

Catalan separatist forces know the government will appeal the decree to the Constitutional Court (CC), which could paralyse the process until its final decision. On Sunday, the government called the State Council advisory body with the aim of presenting an appeal against the decree this week. In less than two hours the State Council passed two resolutions giving support to the government's appeal. Saénz de Santamaría declared that “no actions toward executing it [the referendum]” will be allowed once the CC suspends the decree.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, in an official visit to

China, told journalists that Mas “has got himself in a mess over this all on his own. We told him what was going to happen, it's what we have always said. I suppose he thought we were going to back down, but we are going to do what we said we would do.”

Basque nationalists have also been quick to react. Regional president *Iñigo Urkullu* of the ruling Basque Nationalist Party called for a new status of the Basque region within Spain. Earlier this year, the Basque parliament passed a resolution declaring self-determination, and in June, 100,000 people formed a 123 kilometre-long human chain demanding a referendum.

There are now several possible outcomes. The first is that Mas suspends the referendum once it is declared illegal. Mas has already said in that case he would call snap elections in the region and make them a plebiscite on separation.

This would create tensions with the Republican Left of Catalonia (*Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya*, ERC) and the Popular Unity Candidates (*Candidatura d'Unitat Popular*, CUP). Both parties have stated that Catalans should carry out a civil disobedience campaign if the central government denies them the referendum. The Stalinist and Green alliance, Initiative for Catalonia Greens (*Iniciativa per Catalunya Verds*, ICV), have called for maintaining unity among pro-referendum forces.

The other outcome is pushing forward with an illegal referendum, which would risk suspension of Catalonia's autonomy. The government could also deploy armed forces, arrest Mas and put civil servants who attempt to use public buildings and resources under military discipline.

Last April, retired Colonel Leopoldo Muñoz, president of the Spanish Military Association, the largest organisation of military and Civil Guard personnel, called for separatists to be prosecuted by a military court for “crimes of high treason.” The Union Progress and

Democracy (*Unión Progreso y Democracia* UPyD), a party that calls for the rollback of most powers given to the regions, has called for the suspension of the Catalan government.

Workers in Catalonia and throughout Spain have nothing to gain from this escalating conflict. This is a struggle between two factions of the bourgeoisie. What unites both camps is their hostility to the working class. All are implicated in imposing mass austerity. The PSOE government (2008-2011) and the current Popular Party (PP) government have imposed one austerity measure after another, including spending cuts of around 63.393 billion euros since 2011, three labour and two pensions “reforms”.

In Catalonia, the PP and the PSOE have supported the separatist forces’ cuts, with Catalonia at the top of the 17 regions in imposing austerity measures.

The ERC and ICV have also imposed austerity. In 2010 they formed the “Coalition of Progress” that included the PSC (the Catalan sister party of the PSOE), which passed an austerity plan that included cuts totalling €1.6 billion. The following year the ERC declared it would work with the new CiU government, which approved unprecedented cuts, including €3.4 billion in health care, €2.5 billion in education, €758 million in social welfare, and €433 million in other services. ICV’s sister party in the south of Spain has over the last two years slashed the regional budget by €2.6 billion.

This has created a social catastrophe. There is now 27 percent unemployment, 20 percent of the population lives below the poverty line and wages have been cut by an average of 7 percent.

The mass opposition amongst the working class to austerity and pauperization has been repeatedly diverted by the unions into token protests and one-day general strikes. This paralysis has been aided by the pseudo-left, which has intervened to tie workers to the union bureaucracy. Now they are promoting Catalan nationalism, parochialism and the referendum, as a way of breaking the unity of the Spanish working class.

The Morenoite party, Corriente Roja and En Lucha, sister party of the Socialist Workers Party, have signed a manifesto, “Left Forces for Yes-Yes” [to both questions of the referendum], with the CUP, ERC, the Stalinists of IC and EuiA and other pro-separatist forces and personalities.

One of the reasons cited is to “support and strengthen the social mobilization against the cuts by the Catalan and Spanish governments”. This is deeply cynical, given that

the ICV-EUiA and the ERC have imposed austerity measures. The aim of En Lucha and Corriente Roja is to provide a left-cover for the ERC and ICV-EUiA, while promoting their own careers.

Another stated reason in the manifesto is that the referendum provides “an opportunity to build a country ... which guarantees basic education and quality public healthcare, the right to housing, to public pensions and a dignified job. A country that can protect the territory and promote the culture and where there is no space for discrimination of gender, sexual orientation, origin or any other.”

This is a fraud. In country after country the ruling classes are pursuing a social counter-revolution. Wealth is being redistributed from the bottom to the very top, while attacks on democratic rights, cuts in essential social services like health care and education, have become the norm. An independent Catalonia would be no exception.

An article by the Morenoites, “Catalonia must hold the N-9 referendum”, declared that Mas would not defy the Constitutional Court’s prohibition, because this “would open a huge and uncontrolled institutional crisis and would lead to the emergence of a mass movement that not only will overwhelm him and his party, but could jeopardize the status quo”.

This argument is repeated by the Pabloite Izquierda Anticapitalista, Clase contra Clase and others. Pressurising the bourgeois faction represented by the separatist forces into conflict with the Spanish state is portrayed as a means of sparking a revolution. To refute such lies, one needs only look at Yugoslavia, where NATO, ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and communalist movements encouraged a fratricidal war that led to seven ethnically divided mini-states, subject to imperialist domination and increasing social misery. The answer to the dictatorship of the Spanish and Catalan ruling class and its parties is not the creation of new states in the Iberian peninsula, but the struggle for a workers’ government in Spain, as part of the United Socialist States of Europe.



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