

Catalan government cancels independence referendum

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Catalan President Artur Mas of the Convergence and Union party (CiU) government has cancelled the independence referendum planned for November 9. Mas told a press conference Tuesday morning that a “definitive consultation” on independence “with full and total guarantees” can only be done by holding an election and not via a referendum.

Instead, Mas proposed a “participative process” in which any resident of Catalonia aged over 16 can take their Spanish identity card along to a Catalan government building on November 9 and answer the same two questions on independence that were to have been in the referendum. Ballot papers and boxes will be available, and 20,000 volunteers will be on hand to process what the Spanish media is describing as a “simulation of a vote.”

Carme Forcadell, chairwoman of the Catalan National Assembly, tweeted, “Let’s be calm and listen to the president’s proposal.”

The chairman of the Catalan National Transition Council, Carles Viver-Pi i Sunyer, a former Constitutional Court judge who is advising the CiU, called for Mas to announce early elections, not due until 2016.

Mas has decided not to defy Spain’s Constitutional Court, which decided unanimously at an extraordinary meeting on September 29 to suspend the referendum, after hearing representations from a vehemently opposed Popular Party (PP) government led by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy.

Rajoy described the cancellation as, “excellent news. Spain is a democracy, an advanced country, and everyone must obey the law”. Catalan PP leader, Alicia Sánchez Camacho, declared, “The referendum process is over, it’s no longer alive,” adding that the “participative process may seem like it’s a referendum

but it’s really just a big survey. It does not have any democratic or legal relevance.”

Pedro Sánchez, leader of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), said Mas “cannot continue fooling Catalan society because it generates frustration and fracture.”

Before making the announcement, Mas held a meeting lasting almost 12 hours on Monday with other pro-independence parties in the Catalan parliament—the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), the Greens and former Stalinists in the Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV), and the fake-left Popular Unity Candidature (CUP).

He tried to present his new proposal as “essentially the same” and that, although the political unity between the pro-independence parties was “fractured” it was not “broken”. He insisted “the real adversary is the Spanish state, which is doing all it can to prevent Catalans from voting,” adding that if the Catalan government called early regional elections, “There should be a joint [electoral] list of all the pro-independence parties.”

The Greens, Stalinists and pseudo-lefts have responded by portraying themselves as more determined and consistent nationalists than the CiU. ERC leader Oriol Junqueras declared, “The Catalan government puts us in a new participation scenario that was not agreed upon, that, in no way, can replace the vote.” The ERC would now set about building “a majority in parliament to declare independence and start the process to create the Catalan Republic”.

The ERC has had an alliance with the CiU, enabling the CiU to remain in power. Junqueras previously stated that the alliance would be broken if Mas backed down on the November 9 vote. The ERC received the most votes in Catalonia in May’s European Parliament elections, and polls suggest it would beat the CiU in early regional elections. The next day, there were

reports that Junqueras was backing down from his initial statement threatening a split.

ICV leader Joan Herrera said, “There is no unity because the proposal they have made is not the vote.”

The CUP held a small demonstration in central Barcelona in the early hours of Tuesday morning. *El Mundo* noted that “there were no revolutionary ideas or calls for the takeover of institutions, state buildings or ‘indignado’ camps”, adding, “The CUP, seen as a temporary whim when it entered parliament, wanted to show its maturity before calling protests.”

Quim Arrufat, CUP deputy, said, “We have been very responsible during negotiations... everyone has to assume the same responsibilities, set aside our own interests and allow the Catalans to vote on November 9.”

CUP Leader David Fernández said his party would continue to call for the disobeying of Spanish law in order to press for a vote on November 9.

Spanish pseudo-left parties En Lucha (In Struggle—sister party of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain) and Izquierda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left—section of the Pabloite United Secretariat) have been calling for a campaign of “civil disobedience” to put pressure on the bourgeois Catalan nationalist parties.

They support a referendum designed to give legitimacy to the creation of a Catalan mini-state, transforming it into a low-tax, cheap-labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations, whilst simultaneously diverting the explosive social tensions in Catalonia resulting from the imposition of brutal austerity into reactionary nationalist channels.

En Lucha’s Joel Sans declares, “If we really want a national and social break, we need a second tilt towards the left.” For En Lucha, the first “tilt” to the left is the growth in support for the ERC. The ERC, however, has nothing “left” about it. It is a pro-austerity party that carried out cuts totalling €1.6 billion while part of the so-called “Coalition of Progress” government in 2010 and is now supporting a CiU regional government that has approved unprecedented cuts of €6 billion.

In the same vein, IA leader Josep Maria Antentas states that “the main challenge for those of us who defend the right to decide” is to “create a new anti-austerity and secessionist alternative.”

Conscious that many workers oppose the Catalan nationalist project, the main role of the IA and En Lucha is to provide the referendum with a leftist fig leaf by branding the breakup of Spain as progressive. To this end, Antentas warned in a *Público* article last month 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.”

En Lucha’s Nahuel Quimasó states that “the arguments of social class are not the tip of the lance of the [referendum] process, like it was in the Scottish referendum. We can see this in Barcelona’s red belt ... the secessionist vote would be 10 percent lower than the average.”

En Lucha participated along with the ERC in the “The Left for Yes”, a broad coalition of pseudo-left forces and Catalan separatists, the aim of which, Quimasó explains, is to “reach other social sectors and build a rupturist scenario based on the popular classes”.

The task of the pseudo-left groups is to advise the CiU and ERC on how to market separatism to the working class. Such was their role in Scotland that even the *Financial Times* acknowledged, “The wider Yes movement and its radical socialist arms [sic] are helping win over support among the crucial constituency of lower-income voters, concentrated in Glasgow and other central belt cities and towns, many of whom are traditional Labour supporters or are largely disengaged from politics.”



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