

Catalan independence poll mobilises core nationalist vote

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A “consultative” poll on Catalan independence went ahead on Sunday. But it primarily succeeded in mobilising the upper and middle class nationalist layers that voted for the separatist parties in the last official elections—the ruling right-wing Convergence and Unity party (CiU), the Republican Left (ERC), the Greens and former Stalinists of the ICV and pseudo-left CUP.

Turnout for a poll that was heralded as the make-or-break future of Catalonia was just 37 percent of the more than 6 million people able to vote. Of the 2.3 million people who voted, 81 percent backed the full “yes” and “yes” option, i.e., should Catalonia be a state and should that state be independent; 10 percent wanted Catalonia to be a state, but not independent; and 4 percent voted “no”. Opinion polls suggest that in the general population support for independence drops to 50 percent.

The poll was promoted by the separatist parties as an exercise in democracy, but the reality is it has been designed by sections of the regional bourgeoisie to give legitimacy to the creation of a Catalan mini-state. This would function as a low-tax, cheap-labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations, while simultaneously diverting the explosive social tensions in Catalonia resulting from the imposition of brutal austerity by the ruling CiU government, supported by the ERC, along reactionary nationalist channels.

At the beginning of October, Catalan President Artur Mas’s government cancelled plans for a full referendum on independence for November 9. He complied with the ban instituted by the Constitutional Court following representations from a vehemently opposed right-wing Popular Party (PP) government led by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. All referendum campaigning was stopped.

In its place, largely as a sop to his separatist partners, Mas proposed a nonbinding consultative process that they had to organise themselves. The CUP, which was elected in the 2012 Catalan parliamentary elections, gaining three deputies in a protest vote against the pro-austerity and establishment forces and which promotes itself as the left wing of Catalan nationalism, followed suit. Nothing could expose more their role than the emotional hug that took place between CUP leader David Fernández and Mas at the headquarters overseeing the “consultative” poll. Fernández claimed that “the participation makes an irreversible path to the full political and social liberty of Catalonia.”

All of these forces complied with the ban on campaigning openly and the use of official polling stations, counting facilities and civil servants to oversee the vote. Those who wanted to vote had to print their own online ballot papers and take them to unofficial polling stations, where they were counted by 40,000 volunteers.

Having got the ERC, ANC and pseudo-left to do his dirty work, Mas stepped forward to hail the result as a great success, stating that “despite the enormous impediments, we have been able to get out the ballot boxes and vote.” He added, “Once again Catalonia has shown that it wants to rule itself. We have earned the right to a referendum [on independence].”

Mas called for the various factions in the pro-independence campaign to remain united.

CiU General Secretary Josep Rull declared that the next step would be to “use an ordinary election, supervised by the state with all the democratic guarantees, and we will transform this into a referendum. How? Our proposal is to form a grand national list of candidates that has the capacity to win an absolute majority and with one electoral programme:

If you vote for us, we have the mandate to achieve independence.”

ERC leaders, aware that opinion polls suggest the party has overtaken the CiU as the largest party in Catalonia, indicated that they will extract a price for holding onto Mas’s coattails. ERC Catalan parliamentary leader, Anna Simó, remarked lamely, “It is not clear that a list led by Artur Mas will win more support than if we stand separately—especially in areas like metropolitan Barcelona. We believe that, a priori, diversification is good.”

ERC leader Oriol Junqueras, who has been silent about breaking the ERC’s alliance with the CiU if they refused to hold the full referendum and thereby allowed it to continue to govern in Catalonia, called for snap elections to “build a new parliamentary majority to carry out a Declaration of Independence” and initiate a constituent process of a Catalan republic.

Rajoy, who had vowed to prevent any sort of vote on Catalan independence to take place, made no public appearances on Sunday, leaving his subordinate, Justice Minister Rafael Catala, to front the accusations against Mas for organising an act of “pure political propaganda” and a vote that would prove “fruitless and useless”. He hinted the government would instigate criminal investigations into Mas and others who had organised the poll.

There is growing criticism within the ruling elite of Rajoy for having underestimated the Catalan situation by thinking he could exploit differences between the separatists and that everyone would abide by the diktats of the Constitutional Court. Significantly, the most damning accusation hurled against him is why and how he has alienated Mas and the CiU, a party which was traditionally against independence and simply sought more concessions from Madrid—and in the process tripled support for independence from around 15 percent a few years ago.

The pseudo-left forces of Izquierda Anticapitalista (IA) and En Lucha have acted as cohorts of the Catalan bourgeoisie in its struggle with its Spanish counterpart in Madrid.

On Sunday, daily *Público* published an article by Esther Vivas, one of the main leaders of IA. Vivas called for a “yes-yes” vote, “not for a question of flags, or hymns or borders, but a ‘yes-yes’ because I consider this the best option of a democratic break with the

regime and because it opens the door to an opportunity ... the sovereign choice to choose our future, ‘yes-yes’ for an independent Catalonia from corrupt politicians and banker thieves”.

On Monday, En Lucha published a statement expressing a similar line to CiU, calling for a “candidature of rupture and favourable to independence”. It continued: “From these elections there should arise a parliament that, if it gets the majority it needs, must declare a Catalan Republic unilaterally which will then call for a referendum without the intervention of the Spanish state ... and prevent those who are attempting to create an identity conflict that is nearly inexistent in Catalonia.”

The IA and En Lucha are fomenting separatism and providing Catalan nationalism with a leftist fig leaf, branding the breakup of Spain as progressive and the confrontation with Madrid as an opportunity that could spark a “rebellion”. It is the pseudo-left that are encouraging workers to adopt parochialism and a short-sighted response to the deep social problems they face, by dressing up the project of separating Spain’s most prosperous region—so that companies and the rich will pay less—as a means of providing better welfare provisions for Catalans. In the process they seek to divide the working class when everything depends upon the waging of a unified struggle for a workers’ government against all factions of the bourgeoisie.



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