

Catalan minister admits independence demand used to divert social unrest

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A senior member of the Catalan Convergence and Union (CiU) regional government has admitted that it fomented Catalan independence sentiment to prevent unrest developing as a result of its austerity measures.

The statement by Planning Minister Santi Vila is confirmation of the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* of the politically criminal role played by the pseudo-left who provide Catalan nationalism with a fig leaf, branding the breakup of Spain as progressive.

They are encouraging workers to think shortsightedly about 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 are dividing the working class when everything depends upon the waging of a unified struggle against all factions of the bourgeoisie.

Speaking to a meeting of Catalan politicians and businessmen, Vila said that Catalonia needed a “minimally exciting project” to put up with budget cuts.

“If this country had not put forward a discourse based on nationalism, how would it have weathered adjustments of over 6,000 million euros?” he added.

Vila said other factors were also involved in the drive towards independence, including the “loss of confidence” in government institutions and the refusal of the Popular Party (PP) government of Mariano Rajoy in Madrid to accept the “reformist proposals” of Catalan President Artur Mas.

Having let out the genie of independence, Vila declared, it was no longer possible to turn back without sowing “frustrations” among the more than two million people who had taken part in the “consultative” poll on Catalan independence on November 9.

The main success of the poll lay in mobilising the upper and middle class nationalist layers that voted in the last official elections for the CiU and the other separatist parties—the Republican Left (ERC), the Greens and former Stalinists of the ICV and pseudo-left CUP (Popular Unity Candidates).

Proclaimed as the make-or-break ballot on the future of Catalonia, turnout was just 37 percent of more than six million eligible voters. Of the 2.3 million people who took part, 81 percent backed a new independent Catalan state. Opinion polls suggest that in the general population support for independence dropped to 50 percent.

After November 9, Mas announced he would call early regional elections if all the separatist parties agreed to a joint electoral list. If they won a majority, a transitional government of national unity could be formed, declare independence and secede from Spain within 18 months.

Last week, the Catalan National Assembly, which has organised one million plus demonstrations on Catalan National Day for the last three years, came out in support of Mas' proposal and called for elections in February. It supported Mas' demands that the separatist parties fall in behind the CiU, declaring, “We must centre the offer around common points to avoid partisan infighting, which might discourage a large part of the electorate or, worse still, lead to an unclear reading of the results for international institutions and the other states we will ask for recognition.”

ERC leader Oriol Junqueras has expressed doubts about Mas' new proposals, but without a shred of principled content. He stressed that the timeframe is too long and elections should be held as soon as possible. Before November 9, opinion polls suggested the ERC had become the most popular party in Catalonia, but

more recent surveys indicate the CiU is gaining ground again. Junqueras also rejects the idea of a single list and a “maximum level” of cooperation without agreeing to a formal alliance, aware too close an association with the CiU could spell disaster. He regularly criticises Mas’ economic and social policies as no different to those of Rajoy, declaring, “Sooner or later it will blow up in his face ... one day the risk premium will rocket up.”

That the attacks on Mas are just a cover for the ERC’s opportunism is shown by the fact it has supported the CiU since 2012, whilst Catalonia became a “laboratory” for budget cuts. That this will continue was indicated this week by ERC spokesperson Anna Simó, who said she was “convinced Oriol Junqueras or any other member of ERC would be ready to do what was necessary to achieve a broad, solid majority in parliament.”

Prime Minister Rajoy paid a brief visit to Barcelona at the end of November to repeat to a select group of PP officials, “The unity of Spain will not be negotiated, and we will never discuss it.”

He called the November 9 poll a farce and Mas “the First Minister of a minority.”

However, there is growing criticism within the ruling elite for Rajoy having underestimated the Catalan situation by thinking he could exploit differences between the separatists, and for alienating Mas and the CiU, a party which was traditionally against independence and simply sought more concessions from Madrid, in the process tripling support for independence from the 15 percent it was a few years ago.

Santiago Abascal, the leader of the new right party VOX, which just fell short of winning its first seat at the European elections in May, declared legal action was being taken against “traitor” Rajoy for not stopping the November 9 vote and suspending home rule in Catalonia. The Chief of the General Staff of the Spanish Army, General Jaime Domínguez Buj, has also intervened in the Catalan crisis declaring that “when the metropolis is weak, the fall happens.”

Buj said the PP government had to “win the hearts and minds of all Spaniards,” but, “We are the tool of the government and of parliament to ensure that the law and the Constitution are upheld. ... We are ready to intervene however the government decides, at home or

abroad, to go to Afghanistan or Valencia.”



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