

Barcelona: Mass pro-independence demonstration on Catalonia's national day

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Last Friday, 1.4 million people demonstrated in Barcelona on Catalonia's national day. The rally was a highly publicised event to promote the pro-independence movement ahead of the September 27 regional election.

Catalan premier Artur Mas has declared the election to be a plebiscite on independence. Latest polls suggest that pro-independence parties could win enough seats to form a government.

For the third year in a row, the march was organized by the National Assembly of Catalonia (ANC), with the full support of "Together for Yes" (Junts pel Sí)—a coalition of the ruling *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (UDC) and supposedly "left republican" *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (ERC). The pseudo-left pro-independence party, *Candidatures d'unitat Popular* (CUP), also supported the rally.

For weeks the privately owned Catalan media and the main public television, TV3, continuously campaigned for the demonstration. Throughout the day, TV3 broadcast the event live. A giant yellow arrow symbolising the way to the Catalan Republic travelled along the Meridiana Avenue, where hundreds of thousands of people awaited, many waving the independence flag.

The rally was divided in 10 different colours, "one for each of the 10 key values of an independent Catalonia", and aimed at portraying this as a progressive initiative: democracy, regional balance, solidarity, openness to the world, diversity, sustainability, equality, welfare and social justice, innovation, and culture and education. The event closed with speeches from the presidents of the ANC and *Òmnium Cultural*, an organisation funded by the Catalan government. Finally, the entire Meridiana sang out Catalonia's national anthem.

Behind all the talk of the "right to decide," ANC and *Òmnium Cultural* are inextricably linked to the right-wing policies of the nationalists who have ruled the region and imposed the full brunt of austerity on its working class. For all the "key values" of an independent Catalonia, the truth is that the regional government under Mas, supported by the ERC, has imposed massive cuts since 2011. Funding for education, health care and other social expenditure has been slashed by 20 percent or more.

There has been a huge growth in poverty in one of the richest regions in Spain. According to a recent study, 2.2 million Catalans, nearly 30 percent of the population, live in poverty, and 57 percent find it hard to make ends meet.

Under these explosive social conditions, the pro-separatist factions within the Catalan bourgeoisie are promoting nationalism in order to prevent a united struggle of the working class in Catalonia with their brothers and sisters across Spain. In reality, a Catalan Republic would function as a low-tax, cheap-labour platform for the benefit of the banks and transnational corporations. It would apply for separate membership of the European Union, which has impoverished the Greek population and converted that country into a semi-colony, and it would also apply to join NATO.

The Catalan bourgeoisie could not have pursued the separatist project without the pseudo-left. They have attempted to give Catalan nationalism a progressive fig leaf by dressing up the break-up of Spain as a means of getting better welfare provision. They have legitimised right-wing organizations like the ANC and *Òmnium Cultural* and their so-called "key values" of "solidarity", "welfare", "equality" and "social justice". 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.

The CUP, for all its left-wing rhetoric, has declared that its hesitancy to join the Together for Yes coalition is mainly in regards to the timeframe for a unilateral declaration of independence. CUP wants it to be declared within three to six months compared to the 18 months proposed by Together for Yes.

The “Catalonia Yes We Can” (Si es Pot) coalition, comprising Podemos’ Catalan group, Podem, Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV) and the Stalinist-led United and Alternative Left (EUiA), has taken its distance from the prevalent focus on independence. Podemos endorses a referendum on independence, but party leader Pablo Iglesias has expressed the hope that a vote in any referendum would be in favour of the unity of Spain.

It is seeking to stake out a claim to be opposed to austerity, but is a determined defender of Spanish capitalism. It fully supported the Syriza government of Alexis Tsipras, which has imposed €13 billion of cuts on the Greek working class, and its own programme and declarations are, if anything, to the right of those formally upheld and then betrayed by its sister party in Greece.

The working class should not look back to 1714, the date the nationalists present, in a false narrative, as the beginning of Spanish oppression of Catalonia. That year, in fact, marked the end of a war between European powers over who had the right to succeed Charles II as King of Spain. Philip V of Spain defeated the army of the Crown of Aragon (Aragon, Valencia and Catalonia), which was not fighting for an independent Catalonia but for the Hapsburg claimant to the Spanish throne, Archduke Charles of Austria.

Instead, the working class should learn the bitter lessons of its own past history. Between 1918 and 1920, known as the “Bolshevik triennium”, Spain witnessed mass struggles influenced by the Russian Revolution, which led to a general strike that forced the government to pass the first law limiting the working day to eight hours. The PSOE split, leading to the formation in 1923 of the Communist Party of Spain (PCE).

In 1936, the working class rose up against the military coup of General Francisco Franco, sparking a social revolution. However, the anarcho-syndicalist National Confederation of Labour (CNT) and the

centrist Party of Marxist Unification (POUM), under the leadership of Andres Nin, capitulated to the Popular Front government, which sought to reverse the dual power situation. They betrayed the May 1937 workers’ uprising, allowing government forces to occupy Barcelona and hand back to the bourgeoisie the collectivised farms and factories.

In all these great events, the Catalan ruling elite suppressed the working class, preferring military dictatorship to working class power even when those regimes suppressed Catalan institutions, persecuted separatists and banned the Catalan language. All the political tendencies that claimed to defend the working class, whether Stalinist, social democrat, anarcho-syndicalist or centrist, played a criminal role in these events.

What is required is a political perspective and leadership based on the political independence of the working class from all forms of nationalism. The working class requires its own party, and this means building a Spanish section of the Fourth International under the leadership of the International Committee of the Fourth International and its programme of socialism and internationalism.



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