

# Spain: Corruption charges and police raids ahead of key Catalan elections

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Ahead of the September 27 elections in the region of Catalonia, the Spanish police raided the Barcelona offices of the leading nationalist party, Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), led by Catalan President Artur Más.

The CDC has formed a pro-independence “Together for Yes” electoral ticket with the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) for the elections, calling on voters to see the elections as a “plebiscite” on secession from Spain. The coalition has a thin majority in the latest polls.

The raid was related to corruption charges levelled at the CDC, which allegedly received kickbacks from a building company called Teyco, funnelled through a CDC-linked foundation called CatDem. Police seized documents, computer hard drives and other materials. Similar searches were conducted at the foundation offices and in the city councils of four municipalities in Catalonia.

These new raids come on the heels of the release on bail of the ex-CEO of Teyco, Jordi Sumarroca Claverol, on charges of corruption and money laundering.

Few in Catalonia doubt that CDC is a corrupt party, and that it has participated in a widespread system of kickbacks in public building projects—known as the “3%” backhander. The now-retired, long-term president of the party, and of the regional government, Jordi Pujol, has already been exposed as the kingpin of a scheme in which his family has squirreled away millions of such payments in the tax haven of Andorra.

The ruling Popular Party (PP) government and the main opposition party, the Socialist Party (PSOE), have reacted by exploiting the corruption case to their advantage.

Spanish Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría called on CDC to “respect judicial

institutions”, adding that the party was prey to a “victim complex” and that “anti-corruption operations by the authorities go forward regardless of parties or elections.”

The PSOE’s Secretary of Organisation, César Luena, said that “behind this web of corruption ... it is quite likely that the party itself was privy, as was the man who has always pulled the strings, namely Mr. Más.”

Both parties however, are involved in their own corruption scandals.

The PP is involved in the ongoing Gürtel and the Bárcenas cases, the largest corruption scandals in recent Spanish history, involving accusations that include bribery, money laundering and tax evasion, and a parallel bookkeeping system to record undeclared and illegal cash donations. The PSOE does not fare better, with the former PSOE regional government in Andalusia overseeing a fraud totalling hundreds of millions of euros diverted from funds meant to help the unemployed.

The 2008 economic crisis has destabilized the whole post-Franco set-up of which the CDC was a part. The long-standing arrangement entailed the CDC supporting PP or PSOE minority governments in exchange for greater regional powers in tax collection, education, health care provision and infrastructure. However, the multi-billion euro bailout of the banks led to the imposition of harsh austerity measures by both the central government and the regions.

Catalonia earned the title “laboratory of the cuts,” such was the enthusiasm of the regional government. At the same time the CDC, complaining that Spain’s richest region, Catalonia, subsidises the others, swung behind the separatist project. The project is based on the Catalan bourgeoisie being able to freely exploit the working class without interference from Madrid. The

embrace of Catalan independence has led to the CDC breaking with its traditional coalition ally, the Unió Democràtica de Catalunya, because of its anti-separatist stance.

The PP government has used all the available legal mechanisms to put an end to the moves towards independence, using the Constitutional Court to limit Catalonia's regional powers and suppress the referendum on independence in November last year. Now the PP government is preparing fast-track legislation to be passed two days after the Catalan regional elections, which allow the Constitutional Court to directly enforce its own decisions and remove public officials who refuse to obey them. It has also prepared a new National Security Law that increases the state's powers to repress anything the prime minister considers a threat to "national security".

Over the last few months, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy made repeated announcements about having a plan up his sleeve to prevent any move towards independence by Catalonia. He refused to elaborate any further about the nature of the plan or the measures he would take. However, he is now beginning to show his hand. It is increasingly clear from commentary in broad sections of the Spanish media that the plan will involve a suspension of Catalan autonomous governance—i.e., a re-introduction of direct central rule from Madrid, under Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution—and/or the arrest of Más.

Officers' associations in the Spanish military have even called for a military takeover of Catalonia to ensure the "unity of Spain". In recent days, Spanish Defence Minister Pedro Morenés openly stated that the army need not act in the Catalan crisis if "everyone does his duty". In other words, if the Catalan president fails to "do his duty" and unilaterally declares the independence of Catalonia, tanks and soldiers may be sent onto the streets of Barcelona.

Workers in Catalonia and in the rest of Spain have no stake in this fight between the Madrid bourgeoisie and the Barcelona bourgeoisie. Both the Catalan and Spanish governments have ruthlessly pursued social counterrevolution, in the name of "austerity", aimed at stripping workers of rights and social services. They are fomenting nationalism in an effort to deceive the working class and carry them headlong towards a confrontation in which only the workers will be the

victims.



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