Spain: Pro-secession parties expected to win in Catalan regional election

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The latest polls for the Catalan election to be held on September 27 show the pro-secession ticket "Together for Yes" to be on the verge of an outright majority to form a government in the Spanish region.

If it were to fall a few seats short, the coalition could most likely count on the support of the Candidacy of Popular Unity (CUP), a pseudo-left group that plays a key role for the Catalan bourgeoisie in providing a progressive fig leaf to the secessionist project.

A poll recently published by Metroscopia in the national newspaper *El País* shows "Together for Yes" winning 66 or 67 seats in the Catalan parliament, where 68 seats is the threshold for a governing majority. Similarly, a poll by Feedback for the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* shows the pro-secessionists winning between 63 and 65 seats. CUP, which has called for a national unity government with the "Together for Yes", is generally expected to win eight or nine seats.

Most polls show the right-wing anti-secessionist party Citizens coming in second, with the Catalan Socialists and "Catalonia Yes We Can", a coalition, comprising the Catalan group of the pseudo-left Podemos, called Podem, Initiative for Catalonia Greens (ICV) and the Stalinist-led United and Alternative Left (EUiA), vying for third place.

The secessionists have called on Catalan voters to view the elections as a plebiscite on the question of Catalonia's independence from Spain.

The "Together for Yes" coalition comprises a seemingly disparate collection of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois political forces that includes Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) led by Catalan President Artur Mas, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), the Democrats of Catalonia and the Movement of the Left.

They have set aside all their differences in the drive to either create an independent Catalan state in a region that is one of the most prosperous in Spain, or to secure greater concessions from Madrid in setting corporate taxes and ensuring that a greater share of tax income stays in Catalonia.

Separatism offers nothing to the working class. Rather it involves a struggle between competing layers of the bourgeoisie and upper middle class in Madrid and Barcelona over how best to gain access to the global markets and step up the exploitation of working people. The call for separation is led by right-wing forces who want to create a low-tax, cheap labour investment and production platform for the banks and transnational corporations.

Like similar movements in Europe, such as the Northern League in Italy and the Scottish National Party, the Catalan bourgeoisie and its petty-bourgeois supporters claim that cuts would not be necessary if Catalonia, the richest region in Spain, did not have to subsidise the poorer regions through taxation. Catalonia has only 17 percent of Spain's population but represents almost a quarter of the economy. It is home to many of Spain's largest corporations, leading banks and top research institutions. But these are parties that have themselves imposed devastating austerity measures against working people.

Convergence and Union, composed of the larger Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), currently one of the main components in the "Together for Yes", and the Democratic Union of Catalonia (UDC) have governed Catalonia since 2010, during which time the region has become known as a "laboratory" for cuts amounting to €6 billion.

They have been able to remain in power only because of the support given by the ERC, which was part of the previous misnamed "Coalition of Progress" (2006-2010) that imposed €1.6 billion of cuts. As one Catalan regional minister said last December, "If this country had not put forward a discourse based on nationalism, how would it have weathered adjustments [cuts] of over 6,000 million

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euros?”

Were these parties to gain greater tax-setting powers, they would be used to cut taxes on business and funnel subsidies to the corporate sector.

In the latest election campaign, nationalist flag-waving has again been employed to conceal the fundamental class issues. The deteriorating state of health care, education and other social services in Catalonia, ravaged by the cuts enacted by both the Spanish and Catalan governments, the sky-high unemployment, especially among youth, and the corruption of Catalonia’s political class, has hardly merited a mention as candidates spar over the secession issue.

This is despite the fact that a survey conducted in March by the Catalan Government’s own research department showed that respondents in Catalonia consider unemployment and underemployment (64 percent), dissatisfaction with politics (44.9 percent) and the functioning of the economy (31.7 percent) to be the main problems facing Catalonia.

“Relations with Spain” came in a distant fourth, at only 19.3 percent. Improvement of social policy on education, culture and research, and health—although presented as separate questions in the survey—totaled 34.7 percent, far above “relations with Spain.”

When social issues have been mentioned, pro-independence forces have sought to deceive the working class with the lie that an independent Catalonia would be free to restore and improve social services and wages. They have done this with the help of pseudo-left forces both inside and outside the pro-independence ticket, such as Podem and CUP.

Aside from the manoeuvres by the Rajoy government in Madrid, including threats to use the military and/or suspend the autonomy of Catalonia to counter any move towards independence, there are signs that the outcome may well fall short of secession.

In a televised interview recently, Miguel Iceta, the leader of the anti-secessionist Socialist Party of Catalonia, made an interesting revelation. He cited a private conversation with Artur Mas, the leader of the pro-secessionist forces, in which Mas admitted “exaggerating” his pro-independence stance in order to bolster his negotiating position with the Madrid central government and thereby strike a “better deal” for Catalonia.

A poll in *La Vanguardia* indicates that only 20 percent of the Catalan electorate—irrespective of their personal preferences—believes that the process will actually result in independence. More importantly, the poll also shows waning support for independence. Only 33 percent believe that there is no room for further negotiation with Madrid and that secession is the only way forward, five points less than in July.

All polls show that even if the pro-secession coalition manages to win or cobble together a majority of seats in the Catalan parliament, it would not win a majority of ballots from the electorate, thus undermining any presumed mandate for secession.

Both the EU and Washington strongly oppose Catalan secession. US President Barack Obama, after a meeting with Spanish King Philip VI, told the press that the United States supports a “strong and unified” Spain. In addition, statements by Brussels bureaucrats have made clear that any region seceding from a European Union member state would automatically leave the European Union and the euro currency as well.

The stage is set for Mas to make use, if he wishes, of a fallback position and backtrack on secession after the elections, while seeking an agreement with the Madrid central government that would upgrade Catalonia’s position within Spain. Such a deal would seek to reinforce the Catalan bourgeoisie’s power to the detriment of the working class in Catalonia. It would be a return to form for Mas and his party, which has always played the role of power broker between Madrid and Catalonia for most of the region’s post-Franco history, while it continues to stoke Catalan nationalism to cover for its own right-wing policies.

A genuine struggle against austerity can only be waged by a unified offensive of the Spanish, European and international working class against all factions of the bourgeoisie and its parties.

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