

Catalan parliament votes to begin secession from Spain

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After the majority of the Catalan population voted for anti-secession parties in the September regional elections, the Catalan parliament voted a resolution yesterday opening the door to the region's separation from Spain.

The resolution, approved 72 to 63, declares "the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic." This constituent process mandates the creation of a social security system and a public tax office within 30 days. The Catalan government will also "start negotiations in order to make the democratic mandate of creating a new independent Catalan State effective."

The resolution rejects the authority of Spain's Constitutional Court (CC), which is expected to void the Catalan parliament's resolution. It declares, "The process of democratic disconnection won't be subject to Spanish institutions' decisions, particularly those from the Spanish Constitutional Court, which is regarded as discredited and without powers". It urges the new government to "obey exclusively the mandate produced" by the regional parliament.

The resolution had the support of the Together Yes coalition (62 seats)—including the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), led by acting premier Artur Mas, and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC)—formed for last September's election on a platform of creating a Catalan Republic. It also received all 10 votes of the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) party.

Opposition to the resolution came from the Citizens party, which rose from 9 to 25 seats in the last elections on the basis of opposing separatism; the Catalan Socialist Party; and the right-wing Popular Party (PP) of Catalonia, whose sister party rules in Spain. Catalonia Yes We Can—an alliance of Podemos, Stalinists and Greens—also voted against the resolution.

The vote, coming amid the discrediting of the political establishment by years of deep austerity, has plunged the

entire Spanish state structure into a profound political and constitutional crisis. Less than an hour after the parliament approved the secessionist resolution, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy of the PP gave a 10-minute address.

He said he would appeal the Catalan resolution to the CC and "sign a decree of unconstitutionality asking for the immediate suspension of this initiative and all its possible effects." He said the "government will not allow this to continue. We are setting all mechanisms in motion so that nobody can attribute themselves unlimited powers outside of democracy. With this appeal, I am acknowledging my obligation as a ruler and my beliefs as a democrat and as a Spaniard."

The government is expected to present a written challenge of the resolution to the CC today. The court is expected to declare the illegality of the resolution on Wednesday or Thursday.

Should the Catalan parliament refuse to abide by the CC ruling, an anonymous Rajoy government official told *El Mundo*, there would be economic retaliation, such as the suspension of funding from the Liquidity Fund that would leave many services unfunded and civil servants without pay.

The public prosecutor and the state attorney could also initiate criminal proceedings against those who disobey CC rulings, including Mas, the Catalan president, and the Catalan parliament speaker Carme Forcadell.

The final step if the secessionists continue to challenge the state would be to apply article 155 of the Constitution, suspending Catalonia's regional autonomy. The Spanish Interior Ministry would take over the regional police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*.

The Interior Ministry claims to have investigated the regional police and discovered that only 300 of the 17,000 *Mossos* are separatists. Whatever the precise figure, it is clear that as the crisis is escalating, the possibility of

divided loyalties within the security forces and armed confrontation between security forces is being considered at the highest levels of the state.

The secession initiative by Catalan nationalist parties, that have imposed savage austerity policies on the Catalan workers, is reactionary. Consciously designed to split the working class in Spain along national lines, it is driven by parties representing sections of the Catalan bourgeoisie and affluent middle class, who seek to establish Catalonia as a capitalist state within the geostrategic orbit of the NATO imperialist powers.

The CDC and the ERC, whilst imposing savage austerity measures since 2010, have whipped up separatism to block and disorient rising working class opposition to their austerity measures. One Catalan regional minister said last December, “If this country [Catalonia] had not put forward a discourse based on nationalism, how would it have weathered adjustments [i.e., social cuts] of over 6 billion euros?”

The CUP, whilst fuelling this opposition, has channelled it into more aggressive nationalism, blaming the right-wing Spanish government in Madrid for all the ills facing Catalan workers. Covering for CDC-ERC austerity, it seeks to force these two parties into a more confrontational and chauvinist stance towards Madrid.

Trying to give a progressive fig leaf to the resolution, Together Yes and the CUP included an amendment pledging “social measures.” These include “facilitating the asylum of refugees”; a law against “fuel poverty” guaranteeing the poorest Catalan citizens access to electricity and other supplies; universal health care regardless of origin; annulling Spain’s gag law and the education law; and re-negotiating the public debt with Spain.

These pledges totally contradict the political record and class character of the CDC and ERC. According to a recent survey, Catalonia has 2.2 million poor and 19 percent unemployment, whilst the average salary has been cut by 10 percent since 2010—in years when Mas was in power. The promises of “social measures,” issued in a resolution widely expected to be declared unconstitutional by the CC, is an empty political charade.

The vote has provoked a deep crisis in the Catalan capital, Barcelona. Before the vote, the regional parliament heard heated speeches from both sides. Raül Romeva, top of the list for the Together Yes coalition, insisted that the separatist resolution to start breaking away from Spain was the answer to “a massive demand” by the Catalan people. “No matter how you count it, in

votes or in seats, the results of the election express a clear and incontestable will,” he said.

This is an outright fabrication. Though they managed to secure a majority of seats in parliament, the pro-independence parties only received 48 percent of the popular vote in the September regional elections that they presented as a plebiscite on independence.

Anti-independence parties denounced the resolution as a violation of the law. Inés Arrimadas, leader of Citizens, declared the “madness” of the resolution and the plan to ignore Spain’s laws as the “biggest challenge to our democracy in the last 30 years”.

The Catalan Socialist Party—which calls for wider concessions by the Spanish government to the Catalan political establishment, but not for independence—criticized the anti-concessions stance of Citizens and the PP. This stance, it declared, “closes the door on negotiations with the [Spanish] government and with the one that will come out of the December 20 election”.

At the same time, Together Yes is having mounting problems to re-elect Mas as Catalan president. In his investiture speech, Mas once again promised “social emergency plans”, “minimum guaranteed rent”, “social housing” and a more inclusive “health care system”, trying to give his reactionary record a cynical social veneer, to make it easier to obtain CUP support.

The CUP has stated that it will not back Mas’ candidacy, though Mas cannot be elected without their support. The CUP has stated it would support other candidates from the Together for Yes coalition, who it claims are less linked to austerity and corruption than Mas.



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