

Spain: Elections anticipated after CUP refuses to back Catalan government

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After two months of negotiations, the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) agreed last Sunday not to vote to re-elect current premier Artur Mas, the pro-separatist interim regional premier representing the Together for Yes coalition.

Together for Yes has 62 seats, 6 seats short of an absolute majority in the 135-seat Assembly. The CUP has 10 seats, holding the balance of power to invest Mas as the new premier.

The decision not to vote for Mas pushes Catalonia towards fresh elections after January 10, when the parliament will be dissolved after a new premier is not voted in. The most likely date for the elections would be March 6. This would be the fourth round of elections in the region in five years.

During a press conference yesterday, Mas stated, “My error, the error of Together for Yes, was to trust in the CUP’s sense of nationhood”, adding that “The CUP’s error is gigantic”.

The CUP’s decision taken by the party’s Political Committee and Parliamentary Action Group is not based on a principled position against Artur Mas’s austerity policies. In fact, since 2010, the CUP has provided political cover for the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), the main forces in the Together for Yes coalition. These parties have imposed a 20 percent cut in public expenditure and an increase in taxes and have carried out major privatisations.

The CUP thus assisted factions of the Catalan ruling class in whipping up separatism, to pressure Madrid for further concessions and disorient rising working class anger at austerity. Once re-elected in September 2015, this time with 10 seats, the CUP voted for Together for Yes candidate Carme Forcadell, the former head of the Catalan National Assembly, a “civil society”

organisation tied by a thousand threads to the CDC.

It then junked its previous pledge for a €2 billion anti-poverty package, which it replaced with a €270 million package, a face-saving measure which would do little to help the 2.2 million poor and 19 percent unemployed in Catalonia.

This was appended to a secessionist resolution announcing “the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic,” passed by the parliament even before a new Catalan government was installed. The parliament would then be tasked with forming a new state within 18 months once a new regional government was elected.

The CUP’s support was a charade. Both the CUP and the Together for Yes knew that the resolution would be illegalised by the Constitutional Court, as it finally was. Its aim was to provide a secessionist pretext to support a pro-austerity Together for Yes government and rally support among the petty-bourgeois layers that form its social base.

The resolution sparked a major political crisis in Spain, with all the Spanish establishment parties and the ruling right-wing Popular Party government attacking the resolution for breaking the law.

After the resolution, the CUP attempted to use its 10 deputies to pressure the Together for Yes coalition to put up another candidate to replace Mas, who was increasingly unpopular due to his austerity programme.

Two months later, the CDC has refused to give in to the CUP’s demands. Current CDC general coordinator Josep Rull insisted that there would not be another candidate for premier, and that the CDC would not give ground to the CUP. He said that if his party reacts by “accepting CUP’s demands, it will look like the minority of 10 MPs out of 135 is leading the [independence] process”. He accused the CUP of

“putting the revolution before independence.”

Mas also said he will not back down: “I am anxious to make a stand in Madrid, and also right here, against the forces that are not making it easy for us”.

The next day, the CUP’s number two, Anna Gabriel, made a last attempt to convince Together for Yes to propose ERC president Oriol Junqueras as premier, stating, “we understand that there are possibilities that Together for Yes will rethink its foundational agreement in order to create a government under a person from the ERC, with the support of the CUP and other parties.”

The ERC is no less a pro-austerity party than the CDC, however. It has supported two regional CDC governments under Mas that have imposed savage austerity. The CUP’s attempt to cover for the ERC as a lesser evil than the CDC is a fraud.

The CUP’s manoeuvres are threatening to split the party over the tactical question of whether to invest Mas or not. After the decision was announced last Sunday, Antonio Baños, head of the CUP’s parliamentary faction, wrote a letter announcing, “I couldn’t or I didn’t know how to fulfill the mandate [electoral results of September 27] and therefore I quit.”

Baños admitted to being “unable to defend the majoritarian position” of refusing to back Mas, claiming it is “contrary to the ideas and goals for which I decided to run for the 27-S elections”.

“I was among those who supported Together for Yes proposal and was willing to invest its candidate,” he stated.

The party is split evenly between supporters of Mas’s re-election and those against.

The urban areas around the major cities, especially Barcelona, where austerity has been felt harder, are hostile to Mas’s re-election; in rural areas, there is greater support for the separatist parties and for Mas specifically.

The CUP leadership is conscious that separation is not popular in working class areas. The volatility of the situation is shown by the results in the past elections in Barcelona’s so-called red belt, an area surrounding Barcelona of around 3 million who have traditionally voted for the Socialist and Communist Parties.

In five years this area has seen the collapse of the Socialist Party, the rise of the right-wing anti-separatist

Citizens Party in last September’s regional elections, and finally the rise of Podemos in the last general elections.

Podemos came in first in the region, and in the city of Barcelona. It has called for a referendum on independence in the region, claiming it would vote against secession if such a referendum was held.

What is emerging is the total bankruptcy of the CUP. The party that presented itself as an anti-capitalist party has exposed itself as the left flank of the separatist movement with only tactical differences with the openly pro-austerity forces of the CDC and the ERC.

It has so far failed in its campaign to eliminate Mas, whom it views as an inconvenient figurehead, and replace him with someone more amenable.



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