New Catalan premier installed on pro-austerity platform of secession from Spain

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12 January 2016

Three months after the September 27 Catalan elections, the regional parliament has elected Carles Puigdemont as regional premier for the Together for Yes coalition, with the support of the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP).

The election is the result of a last-minute deal, whereby the CUP has agreed to support a pro-austerity Together for Yes government in order to carry out secession from Spain. In exchange for the CUP's support, Artur Mas, who has been regional premier since 2010, would stand down as Together for Yes's candidate for the premiership.

The new premier is a former CDC mayor of Girona, Carles Puigdemont, selected by Mas himself as he publicly acknowledged. He has been a member of Mas's Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) for more than 20 years. Together with the Catalan Republican Left (ERC), the other main party of the Together for Yes coalition, the CDC has led brutal austerity measures in Catalonia since 2010.

As a mayor of Girona, Puigdemont carried out savage austerity measures, allying himself with the right-wing anti-separatist Popular Party (PP) to carry them out. He made world headlines in 2012 when the city council decided to put locks on waste bins outside supermarkets to stop the poor from scavenging. He stated that this measure "responded to a necessity detected in the city".

This premier, described as a victory for the CUP, was elected with 62 votes from Together for Yes and 8 from the CUP in the 135-seat assembly. The unusually brief session lasted under five hours so as to avoid going past the midnight deadline that would have required the calling of new regional elections.

Two other CUP members decided to abstain, in a miserable attempt to posture as critics of the CUP's de facto transformation into an appendage of Together for Yes.

Opposing Puigdemont were the 63 votes against of the opposition deputies from the anti-separatist Citizens Party, the Catalan Socialist Party, the PP, and the Podemos-backed Catalonia Yes We Can.

During the investiture debate, Puigdemont promised to continue the pro-separatist course, arguing that he was obeying the democratic mandate of September 27 Catalan elections.

This is a political fraud. It was Together for Yes that proclaimed the elections, after an attempted referendum was ruled out, to be a plebiscite on independence. However, they did not win a majority for their candidature; based on their own arguments, they do not have a democratic mandate for secession. Together for Yes and the CUP collectively obtained only 48 percent of the popular vote.

Puigdemont stated that the road map towards independence would continue and called on all parties to "start working in light of the [pro-independence] declaration approved by the Parliament on the 9th of November".

This refers to the resolution passed on that day, illegalised by Spain's Constitutional Court, that pledges "disconnection from the Spanish state" in favour of the "beginning of the process towards the creation of an independent Catalan state in the form of a republic". The resolution adds that the Catalan regional parliament will not be bound by Spain's institutions, including the Constitutional Court that illegalised the document, and calls for an independent social security system and tax authority.

Puigdemont continued: "Our duty is to comply with the democratic mandate of the Parliament, because it was approved, because it is this Parliament's will, the

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citizens' will". He promised to "start negotiations with the Spanish State, with Europe and with the international community" for the declaration on independence "to achieve recognition".

Puigdemont said this was no time for "cowards" and defined himself as the premier of the "post-autonomous region and pre-independence era".

Pseudo-left CUP spokeswoman Anna Gabriel made it clear that they had no substantive differences with the pro-austerity Together for Yes. Their main role would be the most vigilant secessionist force, she declared—that, is making sure that the CDC and ERC, which only recently transformed themselves into separatist parties, would continue the independence process.

In a friendly tone, she stated, "Carles, you have the challenge of opening the process, of creating the most transverse project, but without unnecessary delays. We have to close stages that we will not be able to open again. We have the opportunity to begin a new path".

"We make a gesture of trust", she stated, "because we believe that we have agreed on setting the basis to build the new Catalan republic".

One after another, the anti-secessionist parties spoke to oppose the new premier in defence of the unity of Spain and Spanish legality, accusing the separatists of, in words of the right-wing Citizens Party, of wanting "to divide Catalan society".

Catalonia Yes We Can criticised unilateral independence, and Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias has called on interim Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to carry out dialogue with Puigdemont and the Catalan government. Podemos aims at giving concessions to the Catalan bourgeoisie to put an end to the secessionist process and the political crisis that has emerged after their bid for independence.

Rajoy, amidst a context where a hung parliament awaits to invest a new prime minister, warned that he would not allow "a single action which would contravene Spain's unity and sovereignty, which would go against the law and against the courts' decisions". He stated that the secessionist resolution "doesn't exist", since the Constitutional Court has annulled it.

Following this, he warned the Catalan government that even though a new government has still not been elected, his government would continue to firmly defend "Spain's unity and the democratic coexistence of our common project".

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