

Spain: CUP supports a pro-austerity, separatist Catalan government

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The Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) and the pro-austerity separatist parties of the Together for Yes coalition have joined to elect a new Catalan premier and form a pro-austerity government pledged to secede from Spain in the next year. These events illustrate the reactionary role of the CUP and those who have promoted its farcical pretensions to being an “anti-capitalist” force.

The CUP emerged from last September’s elections with 10 seats. It had the decisive vote as to Together for Yes—comprising the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and the Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC), who had 62 seats in the 135-seat assembly—would be able to form a separatist government.

Under Premier Artur Mas, the CDC has ruled the region since 2010, supported by the ERC. It has carried out savage austerity measures, tax hikes and major privatisations, including 20 percent cuts in health care and education, leaving the region with a 30 percent poverty rate (2.2 million people), and 19 percent unemployed. Currently, it is involved in numerous corruption scandals.

Having claimed they would not re-elect Together for Yes’s main candidate, Artur Mas, because of his austerity policies, the CUP pressured the coalition to replace Mas.

Whilst talks continued, the CUP demonstrated its support for the CDC-ERC. It voted for Together for Yes candidate Carme Forcadell as head of the Catalan parliament. It then junked its previous pledge not to initiate independence unless the majority of the Catalan population supported it.

Finally, it co-authored with Together for Yes a secessionist resolution, announcing “the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic”, and which the Catalan parliament

passed even before a new government was installed.

Appended was a €270 million “social emergency package”, a face-saving measure to cover over the CUP’s decision to scrap a €2 billion anti-poverty programme it had inscribed in its programme. The “social emergency package” and the entire resolution were in any case rapidly illegalised by Spain’s Constitutional Court.

During the investiture voting round, they voted against Mas’s re-election, causing him to fail to win a confidence vote. For two months, the CUP negotiated with Together for Yes, which was divided between pro-Mas and anti-Mas supporters. In the end, local assemblies and its Political Committee voted against re-electing Mas last week.

Soon after, Mas announced he was not standing down. Snap elections were anticipated. Then on Saturday, 30 hours before the deadline to choose a new candidate for premiership, a last-minute deal was reached between the CUP and Together for Yes.

Apart from replacing Mas as Together for Yes’s candidate, the agreement specified that the CUP would support Together for Yes’s policies.

Behind the last-minute deal lies the growing consciousness of the petty-bourgeois separatist forces that their project is opposed by the majority of Catalans. Pro-separatist parties won only 48 percent in the recent regional elections. On the other hand, it was widely expected that new elections would have seen their combined vote and seats fall. Mas himself said that the deal with the CUP “has achieved what they didn’t give us in the ballot”.

Mas explained, “CUP had the upper hand but now it is Together for Yes who controls parliamentary activity with CUP’s explicit commitment to guarantee its stability”.

The deal includes the CUP's support of the new premier, the former CDC mayor of Girona, Carles Puigdemont, who was selected by Mas himself.

Puigdemont has been a member of the CDC for more than 20 years. As a mayor of Girona, he carried out savage austerity, in alliance with the right-wing anti-separatist Popular Party. He made world headlines in 2012 when the city council decided to put locks on waste bins outside supermarkets to prevent the poor from scavenging. He stated that this measure "responded to a necessity detected in the city".

The deal also specifies that the CUP will never vote with anti-separatist parties in the assembly, and will give two CUP deputies to Together for Yes, so that "the government's proposals won't be banned every now and then", as Mas put it.

The CUP then abases itself, recognising its "errors in the belligerence expressed towards Together for Yes" and promises to change its deputies to "implicitly assume its part in self-criticism during the negotiations".

This is the inevitable political outcome of the bankrupt perspective of the CUP. It accepted the basic framework of Together for Yes's separatist politics, while demanding the departure of Mas as a fig leaf to allow the CUP to continue orienting with Together for Yes while claiming to be an "anti-capitalist" party. Now that they have secured Mas's departure, this pretense is being abandoned, and they are wholeheartedly adopting Together for Yes's anti-working class policies.

Mas is now being allowed to reconstruct his discredited party, moreover, after local, regional and national elections have seen his party plummet to record low votes and seats, whilst still indirectly controlling the Catalan government.

The filthy CUP-Together for Yes deal exposes the pseudo-left groups that worked to present the CUP as an "anti-capitalist" force. This includes the Pabloite Izqueirda Anticapitalista (Anticapitalist Left), which worked in the CUP for years before joining Podemos, as well as those that currently have leading positions within the CUP—En Lucha, Lucha Internacionalista and Corriente Roja.

En Lucha defended the deal outright, explaining that Mas will not be premier, nor will snap elections be held. They shamelessly argued that this was due to the

"firm and horizontal democratic" CUP, which prevented "blackmail" and weakened the "right wing". Dismissing the fact, which they acknowledged, that Together for Yes will "almost certainly" impose austerity, they hailed this as a "victory of the break-away left".

Yesterday, Corriente Roja (Red Current) issued a statement warning against "this agreement which throws into question the anti-capitalist and break-away power" of the CUP. It pledged to "struggle to reverse [the deal] and prevent the self-destruction of the CUP as a break-away, anti-capitalist opponent of corruption and of continued anti-austerity policies".

In fact, this experience exposes Corriente Roja's role in promoting illusions that the CUP's separatist and Catalan nationalist perspective would prove to be anything other than a trap and a dead end for the working class.



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