

Spain: Catalan regional parliament votes next steps to independence

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Last Wednesday, the Catalan regional parliament voted in support of the report of the Committee to Study the Constituent Process laying out 11 conclusions and three steps towards Catalanian independence.

The first step foresees the convening of a forum to discuss a future Catalan constitution. The second initiates “three laws of disconnection” from Spain “not subject to control, suspension or challenge from any other power, court or tribunal.” The third creates a Constituent Assembly in charge of drafting a constitution that would be put to a referendum.

The report was passed by the separatist parties—the “Together For Yes” coalition, comprising the Republican Left (ERC) and Democratic Convergence (CDC), and pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP)—that together hold 72 seats in the 135-seat regional parliament.

The regional front of Podemos in Catalonia, “Yes We Can,” voted against the report, the regional wing of the Socialist Party (PSC) abstained and the anti-separatist Citizens party and the Popular Party (PPC) walked out of the chamber before the vote took place.

Following the vote, ERC leader Oriol Junqueras declared, “We have the democratic mandate to build a new country, clean and fair, and a mandate, for us, it is a duty!” CUP deputy Gabriela Serra said the decision was about “disobeying the 78 regime”—a reference to the 1978 Spanish Constitution brought in following the end of the Francoist dictatorship.

Acting Popular Party (PP) Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy instructed the Attorney General to stop the independence process and launched an appeal to the Constitutional Court—moves fully supported by Socialist Party (PSOE) leader Pedro Sánchez.

On Monday, the court declared that the Constituent

Process violates the constitution and has given the Catalan parliament 20 days to inform all deputies and lodge an appeal. It will decide by the end of August whether to charge the parliament’s speaker, Carme Forcadell, which could lead to her imprisonment.

Madrid, Spain’s capital, has threatened to retaliate economically, including freezing the Liquidity Fund that would leave many services bankrupt and civil servants without pay, and invoking article 155 of the constitution, which would effectively suspend the regional autonomy of Catalonia.

The independence vote has deepened the political crisis in Spain, which has now been without a government for eight months. Two general elections have produced hung parliaments with no party or coalition of parties able to assemble a majority. The PP, which secured the largest number of Congress seats—137 of the 350 total—has been unable to obtain the parliamentary support of any other political forces to form a new government.

In addition to the parliamentary deadlock, Madrid is under pressure from the European Commission to implement a massive austerity package targeting the working class. Although Brussels has cancelled threatened sanctions against Spain (and Portugal) for missing deficit reduction targets, Spain must now bring its 4.6 percent deficit below three percent by 2018, imposing up to €28 billion in budget cuts.

The decision of the Catalan parliament to approve the Constituent Process report is tied up with a vote of confidence called by regional premier Carles Puigdemont for September 28. This is aimed at putting pressure on the CUP to support the approval of the 2017 austerity budget. Up to now, the pseudo-left group has voted against the budget but this has led to its fracturing between the most pro-“Together for Yes”

elements and those who tactically see that support for austerity would expose them in front of the eyes of workers and youth.

The no-confidence vote is an expression of the breakup of the European Union (EU) along national lines produced by the capitalist crisis. This has been accelerated by the Brexit vote in Britain, and poses the danger of increasingly sharp national antagonisms, fascism and world war.

The call for independence is led by right-wing forces who want to establish Catalonia as a capitalist state within the EU to act as a low-tax, cheap labour investment and production platform for the banks and transnational corporations, freed from paying subsidies to the poorer regions of Spain. They use separatism to split the working class along national lines and conceal the socio-economic concerns of workers and youth, Spanish and Catalan alike, under a heap of nationalism.

The Constituent Process vote will be used by the Spanish bourgeoisie to pressure the PP, PSOE and Citizens to cobble together a government that will confront Catalan separatism and impose EU diktats on the backs of the working class. An *El País* editorial this week, under the headline “A Government Now!” declared, “the absolute priority in the following days must be a pact that guarantees a stable executive and as soon as possible. The steps taken last week by the Catalan separatists close the path to future hypothetical collaboration... Thus all the weight to form a government lies on the PP, in the first place, and second, also on Citizens and the PSOE.”

If the ruling class is able to exploit Catalan nationalism to divide and rule, it is because of the role of the pseudo-left. The CUP has emerged as the most aggressive advocate of independence. It puts pressure on the CDC and ERC to take a more confrontational and chauvinist line with central government and then uses the anti-democratic response of Madrid to urge separatism. This was the case with the recent revelations over Interior Minister Jorge Fernández Díaz’s attempt to unearth real or alleged wrongdoings by Catalan government officials in order to discredit them. He also conspired with the security services to topple CDC leader Artur Mas and replace him with someone controlled by Madrid. CUP politicians claim the interior minister’s activities were a significant factor in the rise in support for independence from 42.4

percent in March to 47.7 percent, revealed in a poll last week.

Podemos’ Catalonia Yes We Can, by taking part in the Committee to Study the Constituent Process, is complicit in the regional bourgeoisie’s manoeuvres vis á vis Madrid. Its own programme calls for a referendum on independence. But it seeks to combine this opportunist orientation in Catalonia with efforts such as last month’s no vote to make clear its overarching loyalty to the Spanish bourgeoisie—combining empty “left” rhetoric with calls to form a government with the pro-austerity, pro-EU, pro-NATO PSOE.



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