

Spain: Pseudo-left CUP reverses opposition to Catalan austerity government

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In June, the pseudo-left, separatist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) party refused to back the Catalan regional government's 2017 austerity budget, causing it to fall. In response, President Carles Puigdemont, leader of the "Together for Yes" coalition, called a confidence vote in the regional parliament, now scheduled for September 28.

By calling the vote, Puigdemont aimed to put pressure on the CUP, which is split between those who will do anything in their support for "Together for Yes" and those who fear that supporting austerity would expose them in front of the eyes of workers and youth.

Puigdemont's ploy worked. The CUP has now confirmed the party will back him in the confidence vote. CUP leader Anna Gabriel declared that her organisation was offering Puigdemont its "outstretched hand" and was confident that he will adhere to the independence roadmap agreed by the regional parliament in July. This projects the creation of a Constituent Assembly, a new constitution and a referendum on independence. Gabriel said the CUP still wanted a budget that included items earmarked for the various steps on the roadmap and an end to cutbacks in social services.

The CUP's support for Puigdemont allows his government to avoid the danger of new regional elections, which could have cut the coalition's already slim majority. "Together for Yes," comprising Puigdemont's Catalan Democratic Convergence (CDC) and the Republican Left (ERC), has 62 seats in the 135-seat chamber and relies on the 10 deputies from CUP for its survival in office.

Recent polls suggest support for independence has dropped by around six percentage points from the record high in 2013 to 42 percent today. The number of people who registered for the pro-independence Diada

(National Day) celebrations last Sunday fell from 450,000 last year to 370,000, according to the organisers.

Since the regional elections last September, the CUP, while ensuring the continuation in office of the "Together for Yes" coalition, has presented itself as an opponent of austerity and the social cutbacks by Puigdemont's predecessor, Artur Mas, also from the CDC. The CUP condemned Mas's 2015 budget as the work of the "fanatics of austerity."

However, in February, the CUP supported the extension of the 2015 budget into this year, declaring it was the only way to ensure "the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic" and defy the national Constitutional Court's decision to suspend it.

Gabriel's "yes" to Puigdemont reveals once again that the real concern of the CUP is not to stop the cutbacks and restore social services that millions of working class people depend on, but to ensure that independence is achieved for the Catalan bourgeoisie. Puigdemont is seen as dragging his feet on the issue with his statements that a referendum will be held next year "if feasible" and that it must be "binding", that is, held with Madrid's consent.

Underlying the CUP's about-face are calculations that the Spanish bourgeoisie's inability, so far, to form a government in Madrid, after two elections, has produced a power vacuum that might offer an opportunity to achieve independence.

The standoff in Madrid comes as European Union authorities in Brussels have called on Spain to implement yet another massive dose of austerity, in the form of up to €28 billion in cutbacks to bring Spain's budget deficit below three percent of GDP.

Routinely called "anti-capitalist" in the Spanish and

Catalan media, the CUP is nothing of the sort. It represents the interests of a layer of the upper middle class, based in various municipal-based entities, who feel aggrieved at being left out of the massive transfer of wealth to the super-rich that has led to Spain becoming one of the most unequal countries in Europe.

The CUP's *raison d'être* is to divert rising social discontent at unemployment, especially amongst the youth, and at massive, EU-mandated cutbacks into nationalist channels, and split the Spanish working class. Through independence they hope to secure their social privileges by achieving comfortable positions in a bourgeois Catalan state and brokering contracts with multinational corporations seeking to exploit the cheap labour and low tax rates to be offered by a nominally independent Catalonia.

To conceal the anti-working-class content of Catalan separatism, CUP dresses it up in pseudo-socialist colours—all while acting as the foot-soldiers of the “Together for Yes” campaign and recasting the CDC and ERC as part of a broad movement for a “progressive” post-independence Catalonia.

The same reactionary role is played by the Podemos affiliate, Podem Catalunya (Catalonia, Yes We Can) and the local pseudo-left front, Barcelona en Comú (Barcelona in Common) led by Barcelona mayor Ada Colau. They are calling for a referendum on independence, competing with CUP for the loyalty of the same petty-bourgeois social layers while pleading with the pro-capitalist, pro-austerity Socialist Party (PSOE) to form “a government of change” with them in Madrid.

Colau says she is in favour of a “federal republic” in Catalonia, alongside a “Spanish republic,” while also calling for an “effective, binding referendum” on the question of independence. Denying that she was in favour of independence, Colau said, “I am pro-sovereignty; that is, I think Catalonia is a nation and that it can have its own consultation process.”

Ester Vivas, leader of the Pabloite Anticapitalistas and a political spokeswoman for the pseudo-left's voice in news outlets, radio and television programmes, attacked the Catalan nationalists for not understanding the role of Barcelona en Comú and Podem Catalunya.

Vivas said separatists should not be surprised by the two groups' decision to participate in Sunday's National Day demonstration or see them as the

“enemy,” but recognise that they are a “potential strategic ally in defence of the democratic right of independence and the holding of a referendum.” She warned that the separatist movement, dominated by the right-wing, pro-austerity “Together for Yes” coalition, was incapable “of reaching the social majority required” for independence.

In other words, the role of Barcelona en Comú and Podem Catalunya was to promote nationalism among sectors of workers and youth who are hostile to both the separatist forces and the defenders of “Spanish unity” led by the right-wing Popular Party, its splitoff Ciudadanos and the Socialist Party (PSOE).

Vivas, like Podemos, has her differences with the separatists but these are tactical. She says that they must have their “own roadmap, with one central element: the defence of a constituent process from below to build a Catalan Republic that can decide freely in a referendum its links with the Spanish state.”

The referendum demand is merely a device through which the pseudo-left forces and the separatists shroud their real intention of creating a mini-capitalist state in democratic garb, so as to politically demobilize workers and young people and prevent the working class—in Catalonia and throughout Spain—from asserting its independent class interests.



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