

Pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy campaigns for Catalan separatism

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Last week, the Catalan pseudo-left separatist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) launched its campaign for the referendum on Catalan independence from Spain planned for October 1. Its slogan, “Sweep them away”, is subtitled “disobedience/self-determination/Catalan countries.”

Announcing the campaign in front of Barcelona’s Chamber of Commerce, the regional CUP deputies Anna Gabriel and Mireia Vehí called on Catalans to “disobey the Spanish state” and oppose the Popular Party (PP) government’s declaration that it will use “all means” possible to prevent the referendum taking place.

Gabriel said that “the construction of a new republic is only possible through the exercise of disobedience against unjust laws.”

She read out the campaign manifesto: “Let’s sweep away capitalism, the patriarchy, corruption and the monarchy. Let’s decide our own future, let’s disobey unjust laws to build a free, independent and socialist republic,” before unveiling CUP’s campaign poster.

The designer of the poster, journalist graduate David Agrio explained, “My idea was to recreate an old soviet poster of Lenin brushing away the Tsars.”

Agrio is referring to Viktor Deni’s 1920 poster, “Comrade Lenin cleans the world of evil.”

Deni supported the October Revolution and went to work for the new state publishing house, Litizdat, becoming one of the most celebrated agitprop poster artists of the Bolshevik period.

Artists like Deni were inspired by the revolutionary world-historical events of 1917, which signalled, in Trotsky’s words “the forcible entrance of the masses into the realm of rulership over their own destiny.”

The October revolution, led by the Bolshevik Party, under the leadership of Lenin and Trotsky, represented

the first time in history that a capitalist state had been overthrown. It was seen as the beginning of an international socialist revolution, and raised the consciousness of the working class and the masses oppressed by capitalism and imperialism across the globe.

The CUP, in its misappropriation of Deni’s poster, represents the exact opposite.

Catalans are being called to vote for the creation of a new mini-state, which the nationalists hope will become a member of the capitalist European Union, the Eurozone and NATO. It is led by pro-austerity forces, which have implemented billions of euros in austerity in Catalonia.

The whole campaign is being launched on the basis of the “right to decide” of Catalans on their future, concealing the economic agenda and the class character of the new state.

With this poster, the CUP continues to dress itself up in pseudo-socialist colours while acting as the foot-soldiers of the main Catalan bourgeois parties, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT).

In this fraudulent venture they are aided by the media, which casts them as “anti-capitalist.” Nevertheless, their fraudulent attempt to dress up Catalan nationalism in socialist garb met with an instant rebuke from one of the main instigators of the referendum. PDeCAT general coordinator Marta Pascal reacted to the poster by tweeting: “In the name of communism, many barbarities have been done in the history of humanity ... What a failure to be inspired by a failed and totalitarian model!”

The two posters reveal the gulf separating Bolshevism from pseudo-left nationalism.

In Deni’s piece, we see an affectionate and somewhat

humorous Lenin brushing away the people symbolising the old order: the monarchy, clergy and capitalists. Lenin is standing on a globe—we are not even sure if he is standing on Russia. It is clear that Deni did not want to give the impression that the revolution was limited to the country where it first broke out. At the same time, the individuals representing the old order in the poster could have easily been replicated in other countries at the time. The old order was not limited to Russia.

In the CUP piece, we see something completely different. A woman sweeps away figures representing people in positions of power in Spain, including King Felipe VI, his sister Princess Cristina (tried on corruption charges), current Popular Party Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, former PP Prime Minister José María Aznar, the former Archbishop of Madrid Rouco Varela, and Ana Patricia Botín, executive chairman of Santander bank.

The only Catalan bourgeois figures represented are the former heads of the regional government, Artur Mas and Jordi Pujol. But this would have been more effective and less a case of window-dressing if the political heirs of Mas and Pujol were not bedfellows of the CUP in advocating national separatism.

The contrast between the two posters is striking. Deni pictures Lenin sweeping the old order from the world. The CUP's woman is preparing an aggressive expansion of Catalan nationalism—sweeping Spanish figures from Catalan-speaking areas, including not just Catalonia, but Valencia, the Balearic Islands and parts of Aragon, as well as Roussillon in southeast France.

It is a small glimpse of the nationalism, parochialism and self-centred attitudes of the upper-middle class layers that compose the CUP's membership. They care only about “sweeping away” politicians and bankers from their strip of land, all of whom are easily identified “bogeymen”. And even this is mere rhetoric.

The CUP's aim is to divert rising social discontent at unemployment, especially among the youth, and at massive EU-mandated austerity cuts into nationalist channels, in the process splitting the Spanish working class against itself and in support of rival factions of the bourgeoisie.

Through carving up a linguistically homogeneous state they hope to secure their social privileges in one of Spain's richest regions, as a broker of contracts with multinational corporations, seeking to exploit cheap

labour and low tax rates. Indeed, if the CUP were honest about sweeping out the old order, even in the “Catalan countries”, they would have to put themselves at the wrong end of the broom.

Following the regional elections in September 2015, the CUP, with its 10 seats, held the balance of power. Its support allowed the Together for Yes coalition—comprising ERC and the PDeCAT—to form a government pledged to secede from Spain. As part of the deal, the CUP forced the replacement of Mas—a man associated with the region's savage austerity measures—by Carles Puigdemont. This operation was a cover for CUP to continue to pose as anti-capitalist, while securing its place in the corridors of power.

In exchange for the referendum pledge, the CUP's main concern, the party supported the 2016 and 2017 regional budgets which continued the austerity line implemented by Mas and led to Catalonia being dubbed the “laboratory of cuts”—accounting for 20 percent or more (€8 billion) in the budgets for education, health care and other social services.

If one was to compare the CUP's poster with Soviet posters, it would not be those produced in the period of the Revolution and Civil War, but from the 1930s onward—when the counterrevolutionary Stalinist bureaucracy usurped power, rejecting world socialist revolution in favour of the nationalist chimera of building “socialism in one country.”

Its rise to power—a result of the exhaustion of the Russian working class in the aftermath of the civil war, and economic shortages, exacerbated massively by the defeats suffered by the European working class, especially in Germany—contributed to the demoralization and capitulation of artists, including Deni. Those who resisted were driven into obscurity, imprisoned or executed.



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