

Anger at war, government complicity with terrorism erupts at Barcelona march

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The official march called Saturday after the August 17 terror attack in Barcelona turned into an unprecedented demonstration of public hostility to imperialist proxy wars in the Middle East that spawned the Islamist networks now carrying out terror attacks across Europe.

Spanish King Felipe VI, Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and other top officials were greeted with booing, honking car horns, and shouts of “Your policies, our dead.” Others at the 500,000-strong march denounced Spanish weapons sales to Middle East countries like Saudi Arabia, shouting, “Felipe, if you want peace you don’t do weapons trafficking” and “Mariano, we want peace not weapons sales.” As the King and Rajoy marched, they were repeatedly met with catcalls and shouts of “Get out, get out.”

Rajoy’s conservative Popular Party (PP) government and regional authorities in Catalonia had called what they hoped would be a right-wing protest, denouncing terrorism and calling for peace and unity behind the police and the state. This backfired, however, as large numbers of protesters denounced war and official complicity with terrorism.

As the conservative Internet daily *El Español* confessed, pre-prepared, official “blue signs calling for peace were overwhelmed by others, that blamed the heads of state and of government for weapons trafficking, and connected the Spanish monarch to Saudi Arabia, a country accused of financing the Islamic State,” which carried out the Barcelona attack.

Protesters held pictures of King Felipe meeting Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz, or of former PP Prime Minister José Maria Aznar meeting with US President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair as they led the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Protesters also cited evidence of state foreknowledge

or even complicity in the attack, as Madrid-Barcelona rivalries grow before the scheduled October 1 Catalan independence referendum. One man, who told *El País* that “the King cannot come to a pacifist demonstration and sell weapons to Saudi Arabia,” added that “the government hid information about the terrorists from the *Mossos d’Esquadra*,” the Catalan regional police.

On Sunday, Rajoy was compelled to respond to press reports of his debacle at the march. He refused to address any of the protesters’ criticisms, but arrogantly declared, “The insults of certain people, we didn’t listen to them,” and added: “Yesterday we were where we had to be and with those we had to be with, expressing our support for terror victims and showing our solidarity with the immense majority of sensible and moderate Catalans.” He called on Catalonia to abandon the scheduled October 1 independence referendum and “plans for rupture.”

Catalan officials, shocked by an outpouring of antiwar sentiment, tried to downplay it. “We should not exaggerate it,” Carles Puigdemont, the president of the Catalan *Generalitat*, said of the booing of the King, adding, “People expressed themselves in liberty, in conviviality, and in peace.”

Barcelona mayor Ada Colau, one of the so-called “Mayors of Change” backed by the Podemos party, refused to even discuss the growing antiwar sentiment. “Citizenship paves the way to the city,” she blandly declared, hailing Barcelona’s support for “conviviality, diversity, and peace.” She added, “In such a big demonstration, there is freedom of expression and many people come out with their own symbols and complementary questions.”

Colau’s statement is a cover-up of the political issues raised by the terror attack in her city. Fifteen people are dead and over 100 wounded in a horrific attack in

Barcelona—the latest in a spate of Islamist attacks since 2015 that have killed hundreds and wounded thousands across Europe, from Paris to Brussels, Berlin and Manchester. Imperialist wars are not a supplementary issue to terrorism, but the driving force in the eruption of Islamist terror attacks in Europe, that must be halted if these attacks are to cease.

Washington and the European powers relied on Islamist militias in the 2011 war in Libya and then in the now six-year-old war in Syria, working with Persian Gulf oil sheikdoms like Saudi Arabia to plunge billions of dollars into Islamist terror networks. They recruited tens of thousands of fighters in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia to carry out shooting or bombing raids against regimes targeted by the NATO powers. In 2012, the Pentagon designated one proxy militia, Al Nusra, as a terrorist group and Al Qaeda affiliate, though it has continued to receive NATO support.

The events in Barcelona point to explosive class conflicts now building up in Spain and across Europe. Since 2015, the ruling class has continued to tolerate terror networks as a foreign policy tool, while using the attacks these networks carried out in Europe as a pretext to press for police-state measures—imposing a state of emergency in France, placing Brussels on lockdown, or putting armed law enforcement on the streets in Britain—based on the lie that Europe was waging a “war on terror.” This lie is now wearing thin, however.

Workers, facing high unemployment and waves of social cuts imposed by the financial aristocracy across Europe, are deeply hostile to the pro-war and antidemocratic policies of the political establishment. This opposition is all the more significant and explosive in that it brings the workers objectively into conflict with the entire ruling establishment, including its nominally “left” factions.

Pseudo-left parties like Podemos—which has sought to develop its influence inside the Spanish officer corps and has recruited General Julio Rodríguez Fernández, who commanded Spain’s forces in the 2011 Libya war—are deeply committed to the war. Podemos aggressively defended the sale of Spanish warships to Saudi Arabia, with Puerto Real mayor Antonio Romero claiming that weapons deals were critical to create jobs.

Asked about the booping of the king at the Barcelona protests, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias was silent on

the issue of war, saying, “People got out their banners, that is beautiful.”

Similarly, the Barcelona attack is unmasking the Catalan nationalists, who continue to attack Madrid in the run-up to the scheduled Catalan independence referendum. On Friday, Puigdemont gave an interview to the *Financial Times* of London, attacking the Rajoy government and blaming the PP for preventing the Catalan authorities from stopping the attacks.

Puigdemont said, “We asked them not to play politics with security. Unfortunately, the Spanish government had other priorities.” Puigdemont cited potentially explosive charges from Catalan officials about, according to the *Financial Times*, “Madrid’s decision to block the hiring of new Catalan police officers this year and to drag its feet on granting the local force access to information from Europol.”

As of yet, no one has explained what role Madrid’s blocking of Catalan police access to international police databases played in allowing the attacks to proceed. Despite the Barcelona attack, Puigdemont asserted in the face of all evidence that Catalan police were doing a great job. “The Catalan police, even if they do not have all the tools they need . . . and are badly financed, have managed the crisis exceptionally well,” he told the *Financial Times*.

These remarks, coming after the Barcelona march, point to the political character of the forces seeking to set up an independent capitalist state in Catalonia. While they level explosive accusations against Madrid and have bitter rivalries over money and influence with the Spanish bourgeoisie, they are hostile to any appeal to working-class opposition to war and are firm defenders of their own police forces. They would prove deeply hostile to the working class, were they to come to power.



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