

Spain threatens potential military takeover of Catalonia as referendum looms

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Spain's conservative Popular Party (PP) government is continuing its clampdown on the referendum on Catalan independence scheduled for October 1. Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy is threatening to implement an emergency clause of the Spanish Constitution to block the vote.

On Friday, Rajoy travelled to Barcelona and said Catalonians "are making a mistake, and you are going to force us to go where we don't want to go." Last week, PP parliamentary group spokesperson Rafael Hernando and Justice Minister Rafael Catalá separately called for its invocation.

Article 155, widely described as the "nuclear option", states that if a regional government "does not fulfill the obligations imposed upon it by the Constitution or other laws, or acts in a way seriously prejudicing the general interests of Spain, the Government" may take control of the regional government to compel it to meet its "obligations" or to defend "the general interest".

The article has never been invoked. Until recently, even Rajoy and the Spanish military have been hesitant to call for its invocation for fear it will set off a social explosion among workers both inside and outside of Catalonia.

The Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) is equally fearful of the possibility of both the breakup of Spain and the possibility that opposition to Rajoy's dictatorial threats will develop outside the framework of Spanish bourgeois politics. PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez responded to Rajoy's comments in Barcelona by supporting him: "you [Rajoy] will do what you have to do." A nervous editorial in Saturday's *El País*, historically tied to the PSOE, noted: "It is impossible for democratic order and chaos to coexist. It is not stable. It is not sustainable. And above all, it is not acceptable. The government cannot permit this parallel

legality to further implant itself..."

Madrid's inflammatory language and actions recall the thuggery of the Francoist dictatorship that ruled Spain from 1939 to 1978. This only increases the likelihood the referendum will pass.

Madrid has taken the unprecedented step of announcing it will take over Catalonia's finances this week in order to "guarantee that no euros are spent on illegal activities," according to Spanish Treasury Minister Cristobal Montoro.

Vice president of the Catalan government and Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) leader Oriol Junqueras has said that this measure is "a covert way to liquidate the institutions of the country [i.e., Catalonia] and a covert way to implement Article 155 of the Constitution." The separatist parties—the Catalan European Democratic Party (PdeCAT), the ERC, and the Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP)—have so far continued to prepare for the referendum, holding public rallies calling for a "yes" vote.

The paramilitary Guardia Civil has seized at least 1.3 million pro-referendum leaflets and posters from print shops, closed down 10 web sites promoting the referendum, and threatened Catalan news editors with criminal charges if they publish referendum ads in their papers or on their web sites. Local police are also seizing pro-referendum materials on the streets and identifying anyone with pro-referendum material.

The 700 mayors allowing public spaces to hold ballot boxes in their towns and cities are now being summoned to court for openly supporting the vote. They have been threatened with arrest if they fail to comply.

For the moment, the judiciary has not sought the arrest of Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont. However, Spain's Attorney General José Manuel Maza has

threatened to do so in an interview for daily right-wing *El Mundo*, adding that “I absolutely do not rule out asking for prison sentences”.

The only precedent that exists is under the Second Republic in October 1934, which is now being widely discussed. These threats constitute a warning to the working class of the enormous political tensions that underlie the present conflict. In 1934, in the context of fascism’s takeover of Germany, Italy and Austria, the Spanish conservative government in power brought in fascist ministers, provoking revolutionary struggles in the working class, especially in Asturias, when workers attempted to establish a commune.

In Catalonia, the regional authorities then proclaimed a Catalan State within the Federal Spanish Republic. The initiative failed due to a lack of popular support and the fact that the anarcho-syndicalist CNT (National Confederation of Labour), supported by most of the region’s workers, did not support the Catalan government.

The subsequent repression led to the detention of thousands of workers and left-wing political leaders. Political centres were closed, newspapers were suppressed and in Catalonia, the regional President Lluís Companys was arrested and the Statute providing the region with a degree of autonomy annulled.

The leader of the anti-Catalan secessionist Citizens Party, Albert Rivera, and former PP Foreign Minister José Manuel García Margallo have both referred to the 1934 events.

Today, the right-wing press is denouncing the Catalan secessionist drive in articles such as “The Republic Already Suspended the Autonomy of Catalonia” (OkDiario), “The first ‘Catalan State’ lasted 11 hours and Ended Up Behind Bars” (El Confidencial), “October 6 1934: the Coup that Finished in the Sewer” (Libertad Digital), or “Catalonia of 34: from Companys to Puigdemont” (ABC).

Once again, like in the 1930s, the crisis of capitalism has witnessed relentless offensives against the working class in the form of deep austerity, attacks on democratic rights and a rise in militarism.

The critical issue is the independent mobilization of the working class in opposition to both the ruling elite in Madrid and the bourgeois separatists in Catalonia and for the unity of the Spanish working class with their international class brothers and sisters. Neither the

Balkanization in Spain, nor the growth of a repressive police apparatus centered in Madrid, offer anything to workers.

The Catalan separatists are reacting by fraudulently posing as defenders of democratic rights. The same forces that have clamped down numerous protests and strikes by workers and youth over the years against their successive austerity policies in the region are now presenting themselves as the defenders of “democracy” against “repression”. Puigdemont has likened his separatist movement’s struggle with Madrid to Spain’s 1936-39 Civil War and even the Vietnam War, saying in a TV interview, “Every day is a Vietnam.”

The Podemos party is deeply divided and, for now, remaining on the sidelines. While opposing the degree of Rajoy’s clampdown, the party claims this referendum is not legal but supports it as a “citizens mobilization”. As staunch defenders of Spanish imperialism and its geopolitical interests internationally, they oppose separatism, but, like much of the European and US bourgeois press, propose to give concessions to the Catalan nationalists in order to stop the secessionist drive.

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias has said the PP’s measures are endangering Spanish interests: “We are not only ruled by corrupt people, they are also useless and pyromaniacs who are bringing our democracy to a state of exception.”

Podemos hopes that the minority PP government will burn itself out against the secessionists, opening the door to a “progressive” Socialist Party-Podemos coalition government that would be better able to contain both growing social anger and the Catalan secession drive.



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