EU hands Spain blank check for stepped-up police repression in Catalonia

Alex Lantier, Alejandro López
3 October 2017

The day after images of the savage repression of the Catalan independence referendum by Spanish police shocked people around the world, Spain's Congress announced yesterday that it did not have time to invite Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to discuss the Catalan issue until October 10.

With 16,000 *Guardia Civil* still in Catalonia, this was a declaration of confidence in Rajoy's crackdown. It is also a warning that, after Catalan officials claimed a victory in the referendum and announced plans to secede on Sunday night, Madrid is preparing new, even bloodier attacks.

On Sunday, the world received an unforgettable lesson on the anti-democratic methods of a major, supposedly "democratic" capitalist state in Western Europe. Faced with a Catalan independence referendum it opposed, Rajoy's minority Popular Party (PP) government sent in tens of thousands of police in a failed attempt to smash the referendum by terrorizing the population. *Guardia Civil* units broke into and smashed polling places including schools and sports arenas, stole ballot boxes and beat up peaceful, defenseless voters.

Horrific videos flooded the Internet—of an elderly woman speaking, covered in blood, after *Guardia Civil* picked her up and threw her face-first onto the pavement; of police beating Catalan firefighters; of *Guardia Civil* grabbing young women peacefully sitting on the ground in polling stations by their hair and throwing them down flights of stairs. One video in Girona showed a police unit surrounded by a large mass of voters that suddenly ceased beating them when the voters raised their hands and chanted, "Assassins, assassins."

French Economy Minister Bruno Le Maire spoke for the entire European ruling class when he made clear that the bloody images of mass police repression in Catalonia did not trouble him.

"All these decisions are matters of Spanish sovereignty," Le Maire told RTL radio. "What would we say if the Spanish government started giving opinions on the situation in France, on the ways we handle our issues of public order? All these decisions belong to the Spanish government, and they are its exclusive responsibility."

The European Commission echoed Le Maire, handing Rajoy a blank check for new onslaughts against the Catalan population, signed by the entire European Union. In a statement published online yesterday placing its seal of approval on Madrid's repression, it declared: "We trust the leadership of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to manage this difficult process in full respect of the Spanish Constitution and of the fundamental rights of citizens enshrined therein."

Reaching new lows of hypocrisy even for the EU bureaucracy in Brussels, the Commission added, "Violence can never be an instrument in politics."

With this support, the Spanish press is whipping up nationalist, law-and-order hysteria and promoting far-right protests of hundreds and in some cases several thousands of people being held across Spain. While the press invariably describes them euphemistically as protests "for the unity of Spain," it also blandly reports that protesters are singing songs of the 1939-1978 Spanish fascist regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco, such as the *Hymn of the Legion* or *Cara al Sol*.

In a noticeable echo of the Francoite regime's traditional denunciations of regional separatists and communists, the right-wing *La Razón* blamed Sunday's violence on the Catalan population. It declared, "Civil guards and police officers acted with their accustomed and proportionate professionalism to the violence exercised by the radicals."

The daily *El País*, while long associated with the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), took a line virtually indistinguishable from the nationalist right. It hailed police actions in Catalonia it said were "of course, taken within the framework of the law, as is correct in a state where the rule of law is in force."

© World Socialist Web Site

El País also denounced Catalan police for not attacking the population violently enough. It wrote that had they acted "as ordered, stopped the polling stations from being opened and seized the ballot papers, the Spanish National Police and the Civil Guard would not have had to do this job later; and we would have been spared many of yesterday's deplorable scenes that were broadcast around the world."

The Catalan independence referendum has exposed the enormous shift to the right taking place across Europe. After a quarter-century of escalating imperialist wars in Africa and the Middle East and EU austerity at home, since the Stalinist dissolution of the Soviet Union and particularly since the 2008 Wall Street crash, economic inequality and social tensions are reaching explosive levels. For several years since the 2008 crash, Spanish unemployment has hovered at or near 20 percent.

The political settlement orchestrated in the 1978 Transition in Spain from fascist rule to parliamentary democracy is disintegrating. The PSOE, the Spanish bourgeoisie's main party of government in the post-Franco period, has been discredited by decades of policies of austerity and war and fallen to barely 20 percent in the polls. Moreover, the truce between Madrid and regional ruling elites in Catalonia and the Basque country has now collapsed.

The ruthless crackdown in Catalonia is a warning to the European and international working class. While Franco has been dead for over 40 years, the class forces that sustained his regime are still in place, and the democratic forms of rule that existed over this period are rapidly eroding. Anytime the ruling class meets serious opposition, it resorts to dictatorial methods—unhesitatingly mobilizing police, military police and even the army as it suppresses opposition.

If Le Maire can effortlessly endorse Rajoy, it is because the entire European ruling elite is moving in the same direction. Indeed, shortly after Le Maire's comment, French President Emmanuel Macron, a close ally of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, drove this point home by placing a phone call to Rajoy to endorse his policies. Macron reportedly stressed that in Spain he "has only one partner, and that is Mr Rajoy."

As Macron imposes his labor decrees shredding workers' basic legal rights despite mass opposition in the French working class, and Berlin prepares new social attacks to be carried out by whatever government emerges from the September 24 German elections, these remarks are a warning. The European ruling class as a whole is preparing for the type of repression now seen in Catalonia.

The critical question is the political mobilization of the entire Spanish and European working class in struggle against the rehabilitation of fascism and the turn to police-military rule. In particular, there must be determined opposition to any attempt by Madrid to crush the Catalan population and the Catalan nationalist parties' plans for secession through the mobilization of the army.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International explained in its statement, "Oppose the state crackdown on the Catalan independence referendum!," this can be accomplished only by the revolutionary unification and mobilization of the working class across Europe in struggle against war and capitalism, and for socialism.

This underlines the essential bankruptcy of the Catalan nationalists' opposition to Madrid. Having led right-wing, pro-austerity administrations in Catalonia, they are both incapable of and hostile to making an appeal for support against Rajoy to the European working class.

The appeals of regional premier Carles Puigdemont and of the Podemos-backed mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, to the EU to adjudicate the crisis are impotent. They are being studiously ignored by the EU governments, which are preparing for their own confrontations with the working class and endorsing Rajoy's assault on Catalonia. Similarly, they are planning the one-day general strike being held today by Catalan nationalist parties, trade unions and business groups as a harmless, symbolic action that will do nothing against the threat of military rule.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site