

Spanish king demands new crackdown in Catalonia

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In an ominous address last night branding Catalonia an outlaw region of Spain, King Felipe VI denounced Sunday's Catalan independence referendum and demanded that the Spanish state seize control of the region.

An open intervention by the Spanish king into public affairs is without precedent since the February 23, 1981 military coup, shortly after Spain's 1978 Transition to parliamentary democracy. Coming amid a vicious press campaign demonizing Catalonia after police repression failed to halt the referendum, the king's speech is a signal that plans for an even broader military-police intervention against Catalonia are being actively prepared.

Attacking the Catalan authorities for "threatening the social and economic stability of Catalonia and of Spain," Felipe VI said they had "systematically undermined legally and legitimately approved norms, showing an intolerable disloyalty to the powers of the state. ... These authorities, in a clear and unmistakable way, have placed themselves outside the framework of law and of democracy."

In this situation, he continued, "it is the responsibility of the legitimate powers within the state to ensure the constitutional order and the normal functioning of the institutions."

The king's brief for a renewed onslaught against Catalonia is based on a tissue of lies. In fact, it is not the population of Catalonia, but the Spanish ruling elite that trampled democratic rights underfoot, sending in 16,000 *Guardia Civil* who brutalized firefighters, Catalan police, and even elderly women trying to vote, in a failed attempt to halt the referendum through physical terror.

Videos showing the brazen repression of peaceful voters have spread across the Internet and shocked

millions of people around the world. Turning reality on its head, Felipe VI blames the victims of this repression for the violence, in order to argue for a new attack on democratic rights.

As for law and democracy, the Spanish monarchy is not in a position to lecture anyone on these subjects. It is a matter of historical record that the monarchy owes its power to a 1936 fascist coup led by Francisco Franco that drowned Spain's Second Republic in blood, in a Civil War in which Franco's main enemy was the working class. After establishing a fascist dictatorship in 1939 over all of Spain, Franco formally reinstalled the monarchy in 1947 and handpicked Felipe VI's father, Juan Carlos I, as his successor.

Juan Carlos oversaw the transition to parliamentary democracy in 1978 and publicly condemned fascist loyalists who launched a failed coup attempt in 1981. His son's speech, however, comes after the post-transition regime and the entire European Union (EU) has been discredited by decades of austerity and war, and particularly by the mass unemployment that has devastated Spain since the 2008 Wall Street crash. The Spanish regime is teetering on the verge of dictatorship and civil war.

Felipe VI all but declared the millions of people who voted in the Catalan independence referendum to have placed themselves outside the protection of the Spanish state.

Asserting the "unity and permanence of Spain," he claimed that in Catalonia, there are "many concerns and deep worry over the conduct of the regional authorities. For those who feel this way, I say you are not alone and will not be; that you have the full solidarity of the rest of the Spanish people and the absolute guarantee of our rule of law to defend your liberties and rights." He said nothing, however, about

the supporters of the Catalan regional authorities.

The Spanish press promptly reacted to Felipe VI's comments with a coordinated campaign demanding that Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's right-wing Popular Party (PP) government invoke Article 155 of the Spanish constitution. This provision would allow Madrid to send forces into Catalonia to suspend its regional government and seize its administration and finances, paving the way for a military-police occupation of the region.

In an article titled "If you can't decide on 155, get out," *El Español* demanded that Rajoy invoke the measure or leave office. It wrote that "Only Alberto Rivera," the leader of the right-wing Citizens party, "is willing to take the bull by the horns and proposes to apply Article 155 of the Constitution to end Catalan autonomy and call elections... If Rajoy is not up to this task, the best he can do is get out and give someone else his place."

Similarly, in its editorial today, *El Mundo* writes, "The person who cannot fail, by his position and his oath to protect the rights violated in Catalonia, is Rajoy. Yesterday we asked him to apply Article 155 to end the unpunished rebellion of Puigdemont and his partners. This urgency becomes more urgent today. The King's message calls him to it."

El País, the main daily close to the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), carries a column by professor Javier García Fernández endorsing Article 155. Fernández criticized those who allow the article to be "demonized, when it is a legitimate instrument to deal with territorial crises."

The main danger at present is that the working class in Spain and internationally is not being warned of the repression being prepared by Madrid. There is broad opposition in the working class of Spain and all of Europe, rooted in the experience of fascism and world war in the 20th century, to a turn to police-state forms of rule. This opposition can only be mobilized on a politically independent, revolutionary and socialist perspective in opposition to the entire ruling establishment.

The reaction of Spain's main political parties made clear that no effective opposition to a new crackdown in Catalonia would come from the political establishment in Madrid.

Rajoy's PP, Rivera's Citizens party, and the Spanish

Socialist Party (PSOE) all hailed the king's speech, signaling they would support a renewed crackdown. Rivera praised the king for offering "hope and leadership" that Spain needs at present, while PP Deputy Press Secretary Pablo Casado applauded Felipe VI for guaranteeing the "harmony, coexistence, legality and of course the historical continuity of Spain."

Through its secretary for institutional relations, Alfonso Rodríguez Gómez de Celis, the PSOE hailed the king's remarks as a "call for harmony and understanding." Other PSOE officials remarked to *El Diario* that, while the remarks of de Celis are the PSOE's official line, it was clear that the king was calling for an end to dialog with Catalan regional officials, which the PSOE claims to advocate. "If we support the king, we are clearly no longer seeking dialog," they noted.

The Podemos party, which has provided political cover to the PSOE, appealing to join it in backing a dialog with the Catalan nationalists, issued impotent and complacent complaints in response to the king's threat of a new police onslaught against Catalonia. Podemos number two Íñigo Errejón wrote, "The king lost the opportunity to be part of the solution. There was neither a call for dialog nor a proposition. It leaves me worried."

The politics of Catalanian separatism, a form of bourgeois nationalism, offers no way forward for working people in the defense of their social and democratic rights. This is only possible on the basis of a fight to unify the world working class around a socialist perspective.

Such a struggle must, however, proceed with unwavering opposition to the military/police crackdown being carried out by the Spanish state and sanctioned by the European Union and the imperialist powers.



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