

An independent class strategy for the Spanish and Catalan working class!

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The violence the Spanish state inflicted on ordinary Catalans who sought to participate in Sunday's independence referendum has rightly shocked workers and all those who uphold democratic rights across Spain and around the world.

Eight decades after the Spanish bourgeoisie crushed the Spanish Revolution under the fascist jackboot and forty years after the end of Generalissimo Francisco Franco's regime, the Spanish ruling class is again resorting to savage repression.

In this they have received unflinching support from all the European Union powers and from Washington, which have declared that the Spanish authorities' use of naked violence to prevent Catalans from expressing their political views constitutes the "rule of law."

The repression in Spain is part of an accelerating turn to authoritarian forms of rule throughout Europe. Across Spain's northern border in France, the newly-elected Macron government has imposed an anti-worker labour reform that guts job security and wage and labour standards and is in the midst of making permanent sweeping anti-democratic "state of emergency" provisions.

In Germany, where fascists have just entered parliament for the first time since the fall of the Nazi Third Reich, a law that forces social media providers to act as censors in the name of policing so-called hate speech has just come into force.

Following on from its brutal crackdown last Sunday, Spain's People's Party (PP) government and the Spanish ruling elite are now poised to invoke the never-before-used Article 155 of the country's constitution. Described even in pro-government Spanish media as the "nuclear option," Article 155 would empower Madrid to suspend Catalonia's autonomy, sack its elected regional government, and impose central government rule.

Under the banner of Spanish unity, the most rightwing forces are mobilizing, including outright fascists. Tuesday evening, King Felipe VI, who owes his crown to Franco's restoration of the monarchy, delivered a menacing speech in which he accused Catalan authorities of "intolerable disloyalty to the powers of the state."

The *World Socialist Web Site* has made clear it opposes the attempt of the Catalan bourgeoisie to carve out an independent capitalist nation-state, one, moreover, that would immediately seek membership in the European Union and NATO. But we do so from the left, from the standpoint of the working class and the struggle to unite workers in Spain and across Europe on a socialist

internationalist perspective—not the defence of the Spanish state and the territorial integrity of capitalist Spain.

The state apparatus and right-wing elements that are today being mobilized against Catalan independence will on the morrow be deployed against the entire Spanish working class so as to press forward with rearmament, participation in imperialist wars in the Middle East and beyond, and the brutal austerity agenda that all sections of the Spanish establishment have implemented since 2008.

The workers of Spain must assert their class interests by intervening independently in this crisis. This means resolutely opposing the actions of Madrid and urging their class brothers and sisters in Catalonia to join with them in a common struggle against austerity and war and for a workers' Spain within a Socialist United States of Europe.

The pro-independence faction of the Catalan bourgeoisie, led by Carles Puigdemont, is no less hostile to the working class than its adversaries in Madrid. Indeed, a major reason for their launching their current independence bid is to deflect mounting social opposition to their own role in implementing austerity.

In the name of self-determination, they are pursuing their own egotistical class aims—above all, to strike their own deals with the EU and Washington, without Madrid serving as a middleman. One of their chief complaints is that Catalonia is paying too much tax revenue to support less prosperous regions of Spain.

In response to Madrid's bloody crackdown, Puigdemont has appealed for the EU to mediate and announced that Catalonia's regional parliament will vote on an independence declaration next Monday.

Both steps are antithetical to the interests and aspirations of the working class, Catalan and Spanish alike, and in essence anti-democratic.

With the first, the Catalan nationalists are seeking to demonstrate their fealty to Brussels, Berlin and Paris; that is, to demonstrate their loyalty to the most powerful sections of European capital, those which have led the brutal post-2008 austerity drive that has impoverished working people across Europe and which are now bent on remilitarizing Europe and developing a European army to more aggressively pursue their imperialist interests on the world stage.

With the second step, the Catalan nationalists are seeking to exploit the understandable popular anger over Spain's anti-democratic intervention to push through secession under

conditions where opinion polls have repeatedly shown that the majority of Catalans do not favour it.

Both Madrid and the Catalan nationalists are intent on polarizing the population and stampeding it behind their rival camps with nationalist appeals.

Faced with these developments, which risk embroiling the Iberian Peninsula in civil war, the watchword of Catalan and Spanish workers alike must be—for the self-determination of the working class! The working class must elaborate its own independent strategy based on the understanding that its class interests are irreconcilably opposed to all factions of the Spanish and Catalan bourgeoisie.

The working class must oppose any and all attempts to forcibly retain Catalonia within the confines of capitalist Spain, including by demanding the immediate withdrawal of Spanish security forces from Catalonia. Catalan workers should oppose the Catalan bourgeoisie's attempt to use the regional apparatus of the Spanish state to implement their secession plans and join with workers across Spain in challenging the austerity and pro-war agenda of all factions of the bourgeoisie.

In fighting for this independent class strategy, workers and youth must beware of the attempts of various pseudo-left forces, such as the Pabloite *International Viewpoint*, to tie the working class to one or both of the rival bourgeois factions. This includes trying to give a progressive gloss to the Catalan nationalists and boosting Podemos. The latter has again proved its loyalty to Spanish capitalism by advocating that the Socialist Party, which has been cheering on the PP government's crackdown, join with it in offering the bourgeoisie an alternate government to save the Spanish state from dismemberment.

The current crisis has laid bare the true character of the Spanish state, which was reorganized in 1978 with the assistance of the Stalinists and social democrats as part of a counterrevolutionary settlement aimed at thwarting a working class challenge to the decrepit post-Franco regime and Spanish capitalism. As this week's events have demonstrated, behind a parliamentary façade, the repressive apparatus established by Franco largely remains intact.

But this is not just a Spanish crisis. It is both a product and part of a systemic crisis that engulfs the entire European Union and that is itself rooted in the greatest crisis of world capitalism since the Great Depression and its end result, the Second World War.

The claims that the EU is the vehicle for the peaceful integration of a democratic and "social" Europe have been shattered on the shoals of the 2008 crisis.

The EU stands exposed for what it has always been: an instrument of European capital for maximizing profit, suppressing the working class, and competing for markets and geopolitical influence globally, as well as an arena for Europe's rival national and regionally-based capitalist cliques to vie for competitive and strategic advantage.

Spain has been ravaged by the austerity policies that successive Socialist and People's Party governments have implemented in conjunction with the EU.

Throughout Europe, the working class has bitterly opposed the assault on its social and democratic rights. But the trade unions,

social democratic, Stalinist, ex-Stalinist and pseudo-left parties have systematically suppressed the class struggle. When in power, the ostensible "left" has spearheaded the dismantling of what remains of the welfare state and worked to split the working class by fomenting anti-immigrant prejudice. In opposition, when unable to silence workers' discontent, they have isolated struggles and straitjacketed them within a nationalist, pro-capitalist, pro-EU perspective.

Especially instructive in this regard is the experience of Syriza, the pseudo-left party that was propelled to power in January 2015 on a wave of working class opposition to austerity. A party of the privileged upper classes, it was hostile to any attempt to mobilize the European working class against austerity and the oligarchical and autocratic instrument of finance capital that is the EU. When Berlin and Brussels rejected its pleas to slightly moderate their austerity demands, Syriza imposed cuts that went far beyond those of its social democratic and overtly right-wing predecessors.

With the working class politically paralyzed and Europe characterized by ever more ferocious strife among the rival bourgeois cliques over the divvying up of a shrinking economic pie, there has been a resurgence of nationalist forces, many of them of an explicitly neo-fascist character, which have been able to exploit social discontent.

European capitalism is manifestly rotting on its feet, as the essential contradictions of the profit system that led to two world wars, the Great Depression and fascism reassert themselves.

In opposition to the 21st century madhouse of the European Union, the working class must advance its own strategy: the development of a working class counter-offensive, mobilizing workers in a common struggle against the EU, all its constituent right-wing governments, the European banks and big business in the fight for a Socialist United States of Europe. A workers' Europe would use economic integration and technological advances to organize socio-economic life under the democratic control of working people to meet social needs, not increase the exploitation of the working class.

In Spain, the fight for this socialist internationalist strategy requires uncompromising opposition to the violence unleashed by the government in Madrid and sanctioned by the imperialist European Union.

Only on this basis will it be possible to wage the necessary political struggle against the Catalan bourgeois nationalists and rally the best sections of the working class and youth to an internationalist orientation.



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