

Amid Catalan crisis, Madrid prepares military rule across Spain

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The Spanish political establishment is now openly debating its options for how to crack down on the secessionist movement in Catalonia and install military rule across the entire country.

Two weeks ago, the debate was whether the Spanish minority Popular Party (PP) government under Mariano Rajoy should implement drastic measures that would suspend Catalan regional autonomy. Now, the question is when and how the military will be deployed and police presence escalated. These discussions must be taken as a serious warning to the Spanish and international working class.

The backdrop of the CC's decision is an intensification of discussion within the bourgeois media and political parties over how best to impose military-police rule.

The Madrid-based media is unanimous in denouncing Rajoy for not moving more rapidly with military force against the separatists. Yesterday, editorials attacked the “inexplicable paralysis of the government” (*El Mundo*), the “Government's delay in making decisions” (ABC), that the “insurrectionary plan of the secessionists advances ... without the governmental side considering any initiative to stop it” (*El País*); and “the paralysis of the Government ... [which] has weakened the constitutionalist bloc and emboldened secessionists” (*El Español*).

El Confidencial reports, “In the PP leadership, they admit that their members and bases are anxious for drastic measures to stop the coup in Catalonia, and still more after hearing the message of the King. For the moment, internal discipline has been imposed between deputies and senators, with the official message that ‘the president knows what he has to do and when he has to do it.’”

This “discipline” has been broken, in fact, by former

PP Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar. Yesterday, Aznar called on Rajoy “to act” and “use all the constitutional instruments within reach.” He added that if Rajoy cannot find “the spirit or the courage,” he should call elections “to give Spaniards the possibility of deciding which government” can face the separatists.

The main mechanism being discussed is Article 155 of the Spanish constitution, which can be invoked if a regional government “acts in a way seriously prejudicing the general interests of Spain.” This clause, which has never been invoked, allows the central government in Madrid to take control of a regional government.

Since 16,000 police deployed in Catalonia failed to close down last Sunday's referendum—the Interior Ministry said that police closed down only 79 of the 2,315 polling stations—such a measure could not be implemented without a turn to the military and bloody repression.

If such a measure was not contemplated previously for fear that it would set off a social explosion in Catalonia and across Spain, now the right-wing press is provocatively calling for such an outcome. As one opinion writer for the conservative ABC noted, it “would lead to violence in the streets ... and millions of supporters and detractors throughout Spain should prepare themselves mentally to expect arrests, suspensions, disqualifications from public office and an aggressive street insurrection that shall be stifled.”

Days after this piece was posted, ABC sees it is too late to invoke Article 155. “This article is only effective if applied on time,” ABC wrote yesterday. Now, it added, the government has to invoke “the Constitutional clauses that foresee the state of emergency, established in its Article 116.” ABC, which sided with the fascist coup of General Francisco Franco

in 1936, is calling for *de facto* military rule once again in Spain.

Article 116 spells out different scenarios for states of alarm, emergency and siege (martial law). It involves the deployment of the military and allows the suspension of the following democratic rights: prohibition of preventive arrest; the right to privacy; the right to free correspondence; free elections and freedom of movement across the national territory; the right to free expression and thought; the right to communicate information or receive true information; prohibition on the seizure of publications and other types of information without judicial process; the right to strike; and the right to adopt methods of collective struggle.

In addition, it stipulates that the government may intervene against “industries or businesses that can upset the public order,” suspend civil servants from their positions and “Order the provisional imprisonment of the accused to be maintained, according to [judges’] discretion, during this period.”

In other words, the ruling class is openly discussing imposing a military dictatorship and suspending rights granted to the working class as a result of its struggles against fascist dictatorships in the 20th century. Suspending these rights would mean arming the state with vast police powers that the military could use to terrorise the working masses, as the Franco regime did from 1939 to 1977.

The other measure being considered is the National Security Law passed in 2015 by the PP and PSOE after the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in France. This law empowers Rajoy to declare a “situation of interest for national security,” define the geographical area affected and assume power in that territory “with the appointment, where appropriate, of a functional authority,” in coordination with the National Security Council composed of the defence and interior ministers, the head of the Spanish intelligence services, and the heads of the army.

The law resembles one introduced by Franco in 1969, which directly targeted the working class. As the WSWS warned, “It is an indictment of the Spanish ruling class that the precedent for this law was one passed and used by the fascist regime to suppress the rise in working class militancy. Between 1970 and 1979, it was used against striking workers on the Madrid and Barcelona metros, railways and buses and

in the shipyards, postal and fire services and the electricity system.”

The discussions taking place in Spain have vast repercussions for the international working class. It is not surprising that former vice-prime minister and longstanding Socialist Party deputy, Alfonso Guerra, declared in favour of sending the army to Catalonia, adding that “in France the Army has been protecting the streets for two years, and no one is discussing it,” that is, whether France is a democracy or not.

There should be no illusions that the European Union will seek to stop the drive to a military dictatorship in Spain. On Wednesday, Commission First Vice President Frans Timmermans said it was the “duty for any government to uphold the law, and this sometimes does require the proportionate use of force,” referring to the 800 injured by police violence last Sunday.

Eighty years after Franco’s military coup, the working class must organise itself throughout Spain to prevent the drive to military dictatorship.

This requires complete political independence from the impotent cries of Podemos imploring the PP to negotiate with Barcelona, a proposal repudiated by Rajoy, and the separatists’ hopes that a major crackdown would simply increase their political appeal. Ignoring the threat of military dictatorship, they are acting to disarm the working class while sowing dangerous illusions in the PP and the military.



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