Spain prepares military crackdown in Catalonia

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With Spanish military and police units already being deployed, Madrid has signaled that it is preparing a brutal crackdown in Catalonia.

Spain's Constitutional Court yesterday said that Monday's planned session of the Catalan regional parliament, at which it was expected that the separatist parties would make a unilateral declaration of independence, must not take place. Coming after failing in a brutal attempt to halt the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, and with Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy rejecting calls for mediation led by the Podemos party and the union bureaucracy, the move lays the basis for bringing in the army against what is now declared an unconstitutional meeting.

The Constitutional Court acted based on a complaint brought by the Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSC)—the Catalan wing of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), which is now working openly with the PP to prepare a military clampdown. Calling the PSC's complaint "relevant and of general social and economic interest," the Court ruled that any act decided by the Catalan parliament would infringe the rights of PSC MPs and be "totally void, without the least value or effect. It warned that defying this order could mean arrests and criminal prosecutions.

On Sunday, the world was shocked and stunned as videos filled the Internet of 16,000 police assaulting polling places and peaceful voters, including women and the elderly, across Catalonia. Furious that its initial crackdown failed, Madrid is now preparing an even bloodier assault, using the military. As the Spanish press debates imposing a state of emergency, as in neighboring France, it is clear that this is bound up with well-advanced plans for military rule and the abrogation of basic democratic rights across Europe.

Rajoy's minority Popular Party (PP) government is relying on the support of the major European imperialist powers. After official German, UK, and French sources signaled their support for Madrid following Sunday's crackdown, the European Union (EU) again formally endorsed the Spanish crackdown on Wednesday.

Opening debate on the Catalan crisis at the European Parliament, Frans Timmermans, the first vice president of the EU Commission, unequivocally endorsed Madrid's use of force against the population of Catalonia. "The regional government of Catalonia has chosen to ignore the law in organizing the referendum of last Sunday," Timmermans declared, adding: "it is the duty for any government to uphold the law, and this sometimes does require the proportionate use of force."

Yesterday, Spanish Defense Minister María Dolores de Cospedal made clear that Madrid views an army intervention to be a legitimate response in Catalonia. At a meeting at the School for Higher Defense Studies, she insisted that Spain's army is tasked with "defending its territorial integrity and constitutional order." After King Felipe VI declared in a bellicose speech Tuesday that Catalan nationalists had placed themselves outside the law and democracy, Cospedal added, "Everything that is located outside of democracy is a threat to our nation."

Spanish army units are already providing logistical support to police deployed in Catalonia. And after Catalan regional premier Carles Puigdemont indicated after Sunday's crackdown that he could declare independence on Monday, a measure that Madrid has stated for months is illegal, political maneuvers by Madrid to seize the Catalan government are underway.

There are also moves underway by the Spanish judiciary to prosecute Catalan judges and Catalan police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, for failing to crack down on voters and demonstrating sympathy for separatists. The head of the *Mossos*, Josep Lluis Trapero, is to appear today before a court on the unprecedented charge of sedition, facing a 15-year prison sentence.

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The courts are also removing legal restrictions to decisions by banks and corporations to move their headquarters away from Catalonia, amid reports that CaixaBank could soon move to Mallorca.

On Thursday, Rajoy also rejected appeals for mediation from Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias and Puigdemont, supported by the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO) and social-democratic General Union of Labor (UGT) union bureaucracies. When Iglesias phoned Rajoy to discuss the plan, Rajoy thanked Iglesias but declared he had no intention of negotiating with anyone who "is blackmailing the state so brutally."

This was a direct repudiation of the Podemos leader's comments the previous evening. Iglesias had told reporters, "A group of trusted people should sit down at a table to discuss as a team for dialog. This is what I told the premier of Catalonia and the prime minister of Spain. I spoke to Puigdemont and Rajoy, and they didn't say no." Iglesias added that his conversation with Rajoy had been "cordial," and that Rajoy had "taken note" of the proposal.

While the leader of Podemos held "cordial" talks with Spain's right-wing prime minister, far-right forces are organizing anti-Catalan protests across Spain and singing hymns of the 1939-1978 fascist regime of Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

Well aware that a new crackdown could provoke explosive social opposition among workers in the entire country, the Spanish press is agitating for moving to a police-state dictatorship. They are discussing the application not only of Article 155 of Spain's Constitution, a so-called "nuclear option" that suspends Catalan self-government, but Article 116. This suspends basic democratic rights—including freedom of thought and expression, the right to strike, and elections—and allows for press censorship.

After a quarter century of imperialist war and EU austerity since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union, European democracy is at the breaking point. A decade of deep austerity since the 2008 Wall Street crash, which brought Spanish unemployment to 20 percent, has shattered Spain's economy and discredited its ruling elite. Amid a deep crisis of the post-Francoite regime in Spain, and as the ruling class savagely attacks democratic rights across Europe, the Spanish bourgeoisie is using the Catalan crisis to return to an authoritarian regime.

Madrid's plans for a bloodbath in Catalonia must be opposed. The critical question is the politically independent, revolutionary mobilization of the working class, not only in Catalonia but in all of Spain and across Europe, in struggle against the threat of civil war and police-state dictatorship and for socialism.

This requires a conscious break with Podemos and the Catalan nationalists, who have worked over the entire past period to confuse and disarm working class opposition, despite explosive social discontent. While masses of youth and workers participated in a one-day protest strike on Tuesday in Catalonia, the CCOO and UGT, close to Podemos and the PSOE respectively, were careful not to mobilize any Spanish workers outside of Catalonia.

The Catalan crisis has in particular exposed the bankruptcy of Podemos. It ceaselessly promoted illusions in the PSOE, which is rapidly moving to endorse a crackdown in Catalonia since the king's speech, calling on the PSOE to form a joint government to oust Rajoy. Faced with the PSOE's capitulation to Rajoy, Podemos is now stimulating illusions in the PP itself—even as a bloody military crackdown looms, and Rajoy indicates that he has no intention of negotiating with Barcelona.

As for the Catalan nationalists, who have run a series of austerity governments in Catalonia that smashed several strikes of transit and airport workers, their reactionary plans to develop ties with the EU and negotiate with Madrid the formation of a Catalan capitalist state are in ruins.

Faced with the prospect of a military crackdown, panic is reportedly spreading among Puigdemont's supporters. Among Catalan nationalists in Barcelona, the city's daily *La Vanguardia* wrote, "A strong feeling of vertigo runs through everyone—undermining militant enthusiasms, revolutionary visions, indignation in capital letters, patriotic ardors." It added that King Felipe VI's speech "has accentuated this feeling of vertigo. There is fear that the current escalation will end in catastrophe."

Incapable of and hostile to mobilizing broader opposition to Madrid's crackdown in the Spanish working class, the Catalan nationalists' pro-capitalist politics only serves to divide the workers while a bloody onslaught from Madrid looms.

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