

As Spanish crackdown looms, France's New Anti-capitalist Party promotes Catalan nationalism

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The first order of the day is the need to defend the Catalan masses against the repression of the Spanish state and forge the greatest possible unity between Catalan and Spanish workers to defend democratic rights and oppose the danger of military rule. It is necessary to warn workers across Spain that the October 1 crackdown in Catalonia was a dress rehearsal for a move to military dictatorship in all of Spain. It has been supported by the governments of all the major imperialist powers in Europe and in North America because they are also preparing mass repression and police state rule.

The Catalan crisis is exposing the reactionary role of France's Pabloite New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) and its allies in Spain, the *Anticapitalistas*. As Madrid prepares to send the army into Catalonia and impose a state of emergency across Spain, the NPA promotes the Catalan regional government's bankrupt policy of appealing to the European bourgeoisie to support its bid to establish a separate capitalist state. It tells the workers and youth of Catalonia and Spain to place their trust in moral appeals to the European ruling elites.

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) condemns the military repression, demands the removal of all Spanish troops and civil guards, and opposes any attempt by Madrid to forcibly hold Catalonia within Spain. This does not, however, imply support for the policies or the program of the Catalan separatists.

The NPA, on the other hand, dismisses the danger of civil war and the Spanish media's whipping up of fascistic Spanish nationalism, all but welcoming an army crackdown as a boon to their perspective of building an independent capitalist state in Catalonia.

In a statement, "Let us support the struggle of the Catalan people," the NPA and its international affiliates claim the October 1 referendum struck a blow against the regime that emerged in the 1978 Transition from Francisco Franco's fascist regime to parliamentary democracy. They hail the referendum, which produced an 89 percent vote for separation, but on the basis of a voter turnout of just 42 percent, for having led "the 1978 regime to a major political defeat in Catalonia."

Now, they write, Spain's king, the ruling Popular Party (PP), the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the media "have begun a campaign of slander, lies and smearing of the Catalan popular movement." They continue: "One should take this into account; it is a factor of indoctrination of the popular classes of the Spanish State (and of the European Union) to set them against the Catalan people and to cow them with the excuse of the 'unity of the Spanish nation.' The objective of this power bloc is to justify in the eyes of the people of the Spanish State, and at an international level, new and greater repressive measures..."

The NPA's analysis, dismissing the Spanish and European working class as indoctrinated by fascism, is pessimistic and demoralized. Mass opposition exists in the working class to the PP, which, like the PSOE, has

been discredited by decades of imperialist war and social austerity, which have economically devastated Spain. The PP was able to form a minority government only after a nearly year-long crisis in 2016, after elections repeatedly led to a hung parliament.

The NPA's premise that workers in Spain and across Europe are virtual fascists is a horrific political lie. Objective conditions are ripe for uniting workers in Spain and across Europe in struggle against social inequality, militarism and the attacks on democratic rights being carried out by European imperialism.

The NPA and other petty-bourgeois parties such as Podemos in Spain bear enormous political responsibility for blocking such a development and strengthening, by default, right-wing forces. While Podemos encourages Spanish workers and youth to hope that the PP will have a change of heart and negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Catalan nationalists, the NPA and its allies encourage them to back the Catalan nationalists.

The NPA views the state repression as politically useful insofar as it might push broader layers of the Catalan population, who are currently alienated by the Catalan nationalists' right-wing and anti-worker policies, to support the separatists. The NPA writes, "A faltering institutional rupture has begun, which is sure to radicalize under the blows of state repression."

Hoping this repression will horrify governments worldwide and convince them to change course, they ask readers to "pressure their respective states to recognize the act of sovereignty that is taking place and recognize an eventual proclamation of the Catalan Republic or Declaration of Independence."

This is identical to the line of the Catalan government. It is a complacent and false assessment of the situation that can only disarm the workers and youth, with potentially devastating consequences. In repeated statements of the European Union (EU) Commission and the governments of Germany, Britain and France endorsing Rajoy as the leader of Spain after the October 1 police crackdown, the European bourgeoisie has made clear it is giving a blank check to the PP. As Spanish *Guardia Civil* and soldiers deploy in Catalonia and neighbouring regions, a crackdown is being prepared.

The October 1 referendum has not dealt a revolutionary blow to the crumbling post-Transition regime in Spain. Indeed, it was called by political forces—the Catalan nationalist parties and their petty-bourgeois supporters, such as the Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP)—which are an integral part of that regime. They have long held power in the Catalan regional government, pursuing austerity against the workers in line with the entire EU, particularly since the 2008 Wall Street crash.

Far from having been dealt a decisive defeat, the Spanish army is poised to intervene against Catalonia with EU support, as Madrid whips

up a fascistic atmosphere inside Spain. The media are denouncing Catalonia and promoting far-right protests in cities across Spain, where protesters are singing Francoite songs like the Hymn to the Legion and *Cara al Sol*. The political establishment is actively discussing imposing a state of emergency and suspending democratic rights in Spain.

There is deep, historically-rooted opposition in the working class in Spain and across Europe to a return to fascistic and authoritarian forms of rule. However, this opposition can only be mobilised independently of and in revolutionary opposition to the entire European ruling class, including the corrupt forces that have held power in Catalonia and across Spain. As the ICFI has explained, this entails first and foremost a struggle for the unity of the Catalan and Spanish workers on a socialist and internationalist perspective.

The NPA and its allies, which speak for a layer of the affluent middle class in Europe that emerged from the post-1968 student movement, propose a different, pro-capitalist perspective. Dismissing the Spanish and European working class as indoctrinated by fascism, they try to convince Catalans to fight for an independent capitalist state by making moral appeals to the conscience of European imperialism.

This Catalan nationalist program can only aid the Spanish and European bourgeoisie in dividing the working class and weakening its opposition to state repression and authoritarian rule.

Moral appeals to the EU will obtain nothing. Over the course of the quarter century since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union removed a major counterweight to imperialist wars and the impoverishment of the working class, the ruling class has shown time and again that it is completely indifferent to human suffering. Imperialist wars from Iraq and Syria to Libya have claimed millions of lives and turned tens of millions of people into refugees. And deep EU austerity has ravaged the European working class, particularly since 2008.

The other EU powers will not stop Rajoy, because they are preparing similar policies at home. The crackdown in Catalonia, the legitimisation of Francoism and the turn to military rule in Spain are part of a crisis of capitalism and a turn towards authoritarian forms of rule across Europe. France is installing a permanent state of emergency in order to impose anti-worker labour reforms; after the German elections last month, a fascistic party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), will have seats in the German parliament for the first time since World War II and the end of the Nazi regime.

This enormous social and economic crisis is tearing apart the political foundations of capitalist Europe. The epoch of imperialism and war, Lenin remarked during World War I, "obliterates the difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie precisely because they are both rotting alive." What is occurring in Spain, amid historic attacks on democratic rights across Europe, is the elimination of the remaining differences between the post-Transition regime in Spain and the Franco regime from which it emerged.

Amid this deep crisis, the NPA and its allies have consistently intervened to try to tie workers and youth to pro-capitalist forces, including far-right parties. In the wars in Libya and Syria, they insisted that European governments should arm insurgencies dominated by Al Qaeda-linked Islamist militias in order to effect regime-change. In 2014, they called to build a "Left Sector" within the Ukrainian fascist Right Sector, thus backing the spearhead of NATO's toppling of the pro-Russian government in Ukraine.

The Pabloites' Catalan nationalism and indifference to the threat of military-fascist repression in Catalonia and Spain is of a piece with this reactionary international policy. By their own account, the demand for separation served to build up a petty-bourgeois movement supporting austerity and attacks on the working class.

Since 2008, the Catalan bourgeois and petty-bourgeois nationalists have engaged in bitter budget battles with the Spanish central government, as

the administrations in Barcelona and in Madrid both worked to slash jobs and social spending and enrich the banks and the financial aristocracy.

The Catalan nationalists led anti-worker regional governments in Barcelona, imposing austerity and smashing strikes of train drivers and airport workers. As forces like the *Anticapitalistas* and the IAC trade union blocked the building of a political movement in the working class, Puigdemont and his allies were able to fill the resulting political vacuum by whipping up Catalan nationalism against Madrid. The goal was to prevent the emergence of an independent political movement of the workers.

This was pursued as a deliberate strategy, in which the NPA and its Catalan affiliates participated. The current Catalan councillor in charge of business, Santi Vila, remarked in a meeting of politicians and businessmen that if Catalonia "had not put forward a discourse based on nationalism, how would it have weathered adjustments of over €6 billion?"

The *Anticapitalistas* leadership itself states that the independence movement is a pro-austerity movement of the middle class, hostile to the interests of the working class and including significant sections of the political right—and nevertheless supports it. In his article, "Catalans' decision," Josep Maria Antentas writes that "although it was not directed against austerity, the independence movement was able to benefit from discontent with the economic situation and offered a concrete proposal—independence from Spain—as a way out of the current situation."

That is, the demand for Catalan independence from Spain served to give a "radical" gloss to the Barcelona regime as it pursued policies broadly in line with EU austerity across the continent. This meant that the Catalan nationalists and petty-bourgeois nationalist parties like the CUP found little support in the working class—a fact that the *Anticapitalistas* also admit.

Antentas writes, "The independence movement cuts across class and generational lines, but the middle classes and young people dominate it. The high bourgeoisie has opposed the independence process from the beginning and consistently attempted from behind the scenes to derail it. The traditional working class—historically, immigrants who came to Catalonia from southern Spain in the 1960s—has been less involved. Workers in Catalonia remain divided on independence, and a significant part of them do not view an independent state as a future horizon."

The longstanding indifference and opposition in the working class to the perspective of building an independent Catalan state, Antentas adds, is bound up with the influence of openly right-wing forces inside the independence movement. He writes, "A paradox of the independence movement is that the dominant political force since it began has been the Catalan nationalist right, *Convergència Democràtica de Catalunya* (CDC)."

The character of the Catalan nationalist parties, which are hostile to the working class and virtually indistinguishable in their policies from other pro-austerity and pro-war governments across Europe, confirms the ICFI's call for a "no" vote in the October 1 referendum. Handing power to such forces to form a Catalan state would do nothing for Catalan workers except divide them from their class brothers and sisters in the rest of Spain.

The task of struggling against the Catalan nationalists belongs to the workers. However reactionary their policies, the task of opposing them cannot be left to the efforts of the PP government, its fascistic allies, the PSOE and the bayonets of the Spanish army to impose an enforced unity of Spain.

In the face of the growing danger of an army crackdown in Catalonia, the struggle against the danger of civil war and authoritarian rule can be waged only as a revolutionary struggle of the working class against the capitalist state, the bourgeois parties and their petty-bourgeois pseudo-left allies.



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