

Spanish Socialist Party demands new elections in Catalonia

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Spain's Socialist Party (PSOE) has taken centre stage in the Spanish ruling elite's invocation of Article 155 of the Spanish constitution, paving the way for the suspension of Catalan autonomy and the imposition of an unelected regime in Catalonia.

On Friday, PSOE Equality Secretary Carmen Calvo announced in an interview on national television an agreement with the Popular Party (PP) government and Citizens to dissolve the Catalan regional government (Generalitat) and hold new regional elections in Catalonia in January. This overturns the legal right of regional governments to call such elections, in place since the end of the fascist dictatorship of General Francisco Franco.

The new elections are part of a plethora of anti-democratic repressive measures being put in place under Article 155 to suspend the region's autonomy. They include the dissolution and reorganisation of the Catalan news channel TV3 and Catalunya Ràdio, the regional Mossos d'Esquadra (Catalan police) and the Education Ministry, accused of indoctrinating schoolchildren in Catalan nationalism, and the possible banning of parties that promote independence. Economy Minister Cristóbal Montoro (PP) has already been in control of the finances of the Generalitat since September.

Should the PSOE's elections in Catalonia go ahead as planned by Madrid, they would be held at gunpoint, under the auspices of a regional administration controlled by Spanish police and military units now preparing to move against the Generalitat under the terms of Article 155.

In the interview Calvo declared, "Yes, [PSOE] Secretary General Pedro Sánchez is clear that it is necessary to take Catalonia to an election." She complained that "there are many things that are

happening in Catalonia and they cannot be allowed to happen ...The Generalitat, the media and the security forces have to be made neutral."

"The greatest revolution of humanity is to arrive at democracy", Calvo continued before criticising those "who want to attack democracy by fomenting a revolution."

Calvo heads the PSOE delegation that has been collaborating with PP Prime Minister Rajoy and his officials to formulate the concrete measures allowing for the imposition of direct rule. He will spell these out after a cabinet meeting today and submit them to the Senate, controlled by the PP, to be rubber-stamped on October 27.

Should Rajoy invoke Article 155, Catalan President Carles Puigdemont has warned he will call a formal vote on independence in Catalonia's parliament, if the "State Government persists in preventing dialogue and in continuing repression."

In an interview with the newspaper *Ara*, Puigdemont's predecessor Artur Mas warned that the invocation of Article 155 would be "lethal for Catalonia" and that new elections without the presence of pro-independence deputies would be "a very bad end". The CUP (Popular Unity Candidacy) has suggested that it would boycott any election imposed on the region.

"At some point the dialogue and negotiation will be absolutely essential," Mas added, and that there are "people who have tried to open this gap" in the "blockade" in Madrid, where "the current Catalan reality is not accepted."

The president of the Catalan employers organisation, PIMEC, Josep González, also called for "political dialogue" to prevent further damage to the Catalan economy. He bitterly criticised the PP government for

amending the law allowing companies to relocate more easily out of Catalonia which had led to the “displacement” of the Catalan economy.

As the crisis in Catalonia erupted, the pseudo-left party Podemos spread the illusion that the PSOE, which maintains the minority PP government in power, could be pressured to break with the PP. It seized on every occasion to suggest the PSOE would take part in negotiations with the Catalan secessionists and save Spanish capitalism.

It is now clear that negotiations were taking place. But as the Catalan newspaper *La Vanguardia* has revealed, they were between the PSOE and PP, for weeks and in secret—over the best way to ignore the pleas of Puigdemont and his faction and impose Article 155.

These involved what *La Vanguardia* called the “plumbers”—Pedro Arriola, a veteran PP adviser for the last three decades under former PP Prime Minister José María Aznar and then under Rajoy, and José Enrique Serrano, former head of the Cabinet for PSOE Prime Minister Felipe González and José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Serrano was also deeply involved in the unsuccessful attempts to form a government between the PSOE, Podemos and Citizens last year.

According to *La Vanguardia*, the negotiations became more intense after the televised message of King Felipe three days after the October 1 independence referendum. The last meeting took place on Tuesday shortly before Rajoy and Sánchez left for Brussels for the summit of the European Council.

Following a meeting between Sánchez and the President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, a PSOE spokesperson said, “We have found in Juncker the support of the European institutions, which today is stronger than ever.”

The dissolution of Catalonia’s parliament and the holding of new regional elections alongside other repressive measures is inflaming the situation in Catalonia.

The Board for Democracy, which comprises 60 Catalan political, cultural, employers and union organisations, has called a mass demonstration today, after Rajoy announces his measures. It is demanding the release of the leader of Òmnium Cultural, Jordi Cuixart, and of the ANC (Catalan National Assembly), Jordi Sánchez, who have been in prison since Monday

accused of sedition by the National Court. The Barcelona Provincial Council approved a resolution on Friday calling for the “immediate release” of Cuixart and Sánchez and for the defence of “the institutions of self-government of Catalonia.”

The PSOE flag-waving for the PP has also had ramifications on its sister party in Catalonia, the PSC, and Ada Colau’s pseudo-left En Comú coalition, that run Barcelona (BComú). PSC deputy spokeswoman in the Catalan Parliament, Alícia Romero, has attempted to defuse hostility to the PSC by claiming “we do not support” the invocation of Article 155, “will not give a blank check to the PSOE” in the Senate and by calls for dialogue “until the last minute.”

Romero called for “common ground” that would later allow a new government to be formed to encourage businesses to return to Catalonia. “For companies to return, what has to be given is political stability and legal security, and that can only come with elections, because the legislature is exhausted. Everything else, whether a DUI [Unilateral Declaration of Independence] or an [invocation of Article] 155, does not return stability,” she concluded.

Colau, who relies on the PSC to remain in power declared, “If the PSC supports article 155, the worst of the scenarios, this generates tensions throughout Catalonia ... and a period of reflection will open in BComú.” The mayor repeated the threadbare plea that “the PSOE must decide between governing with the PP or working for a government of change.”



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