

Spain annuls Catalan self-government, prepares military rule from Madrid

Alex Lantier**23 October 2017**

On Saturday, three weeks after the savage police crackdown on the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy formally announced the invocation of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to strip Catalonia's regional government of its powers. In its place, Madrid is to install an unelected government in Barcelona backed by the Spanish army, *Guardia Civil* paramilitary police and other police units.

The implementation of Article 155 will inevitably involve the Spanish regime in a violent confrontation with broad masses of the Catalan population, where there is deep opposition to Madrid's turn to dictatorship. As Rajoy's Council of Ministers formulated the measures on Saturday, a half million people marched in Barcelona against Madrid's arbitrary arrest of two Catalan nationalist politicians, Jordi Sànchez of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Jordi Cuixart of Omnium Cultural.

The measures laid out by the Council of Ministers entail the suspension of democratic forms of rule in Catalonia and the installation of what is a government of military occupation in all but name. They include:

- * Removing Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont and all Catalan regional ministers and replacing them with "organs or authorities created for this purpose or designated by the [Spanish] government."

- * Transferring their authority to call regional elections to the Spanish government.

- * Granting full powers for Madrid to control the Catalan regional police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, to deploy police or *Guardia Civil* units to the region, and to take other security measures.

- * Assigning control of "economic, financial, tax and budgetary" powers in Catalonia to the Spanish Treasury.

- * Stripping the Catalan parliament of power to name a government or exercise oversight of the authorities set up

by Madrid in Catalonia.

- * Transferring control of Catalan public media to Madrid, which will control them so as to guarantee "respect for the values and principles contained in the Spanish constitution."

These measures are to be approved at the end of the week by the Spanish Senate, where Rajoy's right-wing Popular Party (PP) has an absolute majority.

Madrid's move to suspend Catalan autonomy marks a historic collapse of democratic forms of rule in Western Europe. It is 40 years ago today that Catalan nationalist politician Josep Tarradellas returned to Barcelona from exile in France to lead the Catalan government, as the fascist regime installed by Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War collapsed amid mass struggles of the working class. The granting of language rights and self-government to Catalonia was seen as key to overcoming the fascist heritage of Franco, who had banned the public use of the Catalan language.

Now Madrid is moving with the support of the European Union to repudiate the concessions in terms of social and democratic rights of the post-Franco period. At last week's EU summit in Brussels, held after Rajoy pledged to invoke Article 155, EU leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, British Prime Minister Theresa May and French President Emmanuel Macron, all explicitly endorsed Rajoy's onslaught against Catalonia.

Not only *Guardia Civil*, but also Spanish army units, including the Arapiles motorized infantry regiment in Catalonia, are being prepared for action.

An explosive conflict with revolutionary implications is being set into motion. Madrid's imposition of an unelected dictatorship, after the October 1 referendum produced a 90 percent vote by over 2 million people for Catalan independence, will provoke mass resistance. The PP, which received a mere 8 percent of the vote in

Catalonia's last regional elections, has virtually no support or electoral presence there.

In Barcelona, *La Vanguardia* warned of the deep-rooted opposition Madrid's power grab will unleash. Among Catalans, it wrote, "many are those who, without being secessionists, will cry bitter tears at the imminent collapse of the self-government obtained in 1977." It continued: "Politics in the Iberian peninsula does not admit nuance. The message written in the sand is this: Catalonia is to be punished."

On Saturday, buses and trains were packed as people came from across Catalonia to Barcelona for the 450,000-strong protest against the jailing of Sànchez and Cuixart. Puigdemont joined the protest, as did representatives of Catalonia's main political parties, trade unions and associations. Protesters whistled and booed at *Guardia Civil* helicopters that flew overhead and shouted the anti-Franco slogan of the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War, "No pasarán" ("They will not pass").

Workers at Catalan public television and radio are making clear they do not intend to obey Madrid's diktat. TV3 workers issued a statement denouncing Article 155 as a "direct, unworthy and impudent attack on freedom of expression, of information and of the press and on the professionalism of the workers." They said they would remain loyal to the Catalan parliament, "democratically elected on September 27, 2015."

The works committee at Catalunya Ràdio issued a statement with the heading: "Without public media there is no democracy." The statement pledged to defy the PP. It warned that if the central government chose a new director for the radio station, "we will have no other choice than to refuse to recognize his authority."

It is vital for workers across Spain and Europe to oppose Madrid's plans for more bloody repression in Catalonia. The political goal of the onslaught being prepared by Rajoy and the EU against the workers and masses of Catalonia is ever clearer: it is to stabilize a crisis-ridden EU by terrorizing the workers with the example of police-military dictatorship over an entire province.

The assault on Catalonia is exposing the class content of the vast attacks on democratic rights launched around the world since the September 11, 2001 attacks.

Attempts by US and EU authorities to justify the massive build-up of police units, electronic spying capabilities and domestic military deployments like the French state of emergency by referring to a so-called "war on terror" are a political fraud. The main target is not Al Qaeda-linked Islamists, many of whom are financed by

allies of the EU and the United States in wars for regime-change in Syria and beyond. In Catalonia, the EU powers all support Madrid's use of these powers to target peaceful political opposition because they are preparing to do the same.

Madrid's claim, supported explicitly by the EU, that military rule is the only possible response to the Catalan independence referendum is an absurd lie, drenched in imperialist hypocrisy. Scotland held a referendum on independence from Great Britain in 2014, and Quebec held referendums on independence from Canada in 1980 and 1995. Neither London nor Ottawa marched tens of thousands of paramilitary police and army units to assault peaceful voters and forcibly preempt moves by these areas from seceding.

On the other hand, the NATO imperialist powers repeatedly invoked their supposedly sacred duty to defend secessionist movements—in Kosovo in 1999 and in Benghazi, Libya in 2011—to justify attacking countries such as Yugoslavia and Libya they were targeting for conquest.

It requires no great imagination to see how advocates of "humanitarian" imperialism like the Green politician Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the New Anti-capitalist Party's Olivier Besancenot would have reacted had videos emerged in 2011 of Libyan security forces assaulting peaceful voters and beating elderly women, as the *Guardia Civil* did on October 1. Denouncing Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi for attacking "his own people," they would have demanded that NATO accelerate its timetable for bombing Libya and assassinating Gaddafi.

Cohn-Bendit is not, however, calling for bombing Madrid or murdering Rajoy. He is holding friendly meetings with Macron as Paris gives a green light for Rajoy to launch a neo-Francoite assault on Catalonia while preparing a further police-state build-up under cover of the French anti-terror law.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact