

# Catalonia announces plan for independence as Madrid threatens military rule

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Before the two-day debate opening today in the Spanish Senate on implementing Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to strip the Catalan regional government of its powers, Catalan officials signalled yesterday that they plan to declare independence from Spain.

The invocation of Article 155 had been decided by Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's cabinet on Saturday. It would install an unelected government in Catalonia and seize the region's parliament and public radio and television stations with the backing of the Spanish army, militarized Guardia Civil and other police units. The Senate technically has to approve the cabinet decision, but Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) has an absolute majority in the chamber and approval is thought to be a simple formality.

Last night, Catalan Deputy Premier Oriol Junqueras told the Associated Press that Rajoy has "not given us another option" and that his party, the Republican Left of Catalonia, would "work to build a new republic." The Catalan National Assembly (ANC) has called a demonstration in front of the Catalan parliament on Friday to "defend the republic."

This came after Madrid offered Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont the chance to appear before the committee to argue his case. Puigdemont refused, however, what would presumably have been the humiliation of making an impotent appeal to the Spanish Senate while it moved ahead to approve Article 155.

Antoni Castella, a lawmaker from Puigdemont's Together for Yes coalition, confirmed that "on Friday, we will declare independence." According to the pro-secessionist daily *Nació Digital*, the coalition wants to declare independence unilaterally "as a defensive path" ahead of the activation of Article 155.

This crisis is tearing apart the regional government. Several ministers of Puigdemont's Democratic European Party of Catalonia (PdeCat) government—Santi Vila

(Business), Meritxell Borrás (Institutional Relations), Carles Mundó (Justice) and Toni Comin (Healthcare)—are reportedly threatening to resign because they oppose declaring independence.

In Madrid, however, the PP, the Citizens Party and the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the main newspapers are demanding a renewed onslaught against Catalonia. Above all, the central target of Article 155 is the social rights and political opposition of the working class.

Last September, Finance Minister Cristóbal Montoro took over Catalan finances, supposedly to keep Barcelona from using public funds for the referendum. Now, Madrid is blocking transfers of €10 million to organisations that provide food, children's extracurricular activities and other social services. This measure reportedly affects 900,000 people in the region and 1,300 workers.

Confident that it has the support of the European Union, the PP is also escalating threats to invoke Article 155 in other regions of Spain. While Catalonia is the current target, after years of Madrid threatening to intervene against regions that did not comply with budget deficit caps, legal mechanisms have been created to invoke Article 155 against regions that do not fully comply with EU austerity policies.

After having threatened to invoke Article 155 in the Basque country and the Castilla La Mancha region around Madrid, PP leaders are now targeting Navarre. The PP leader in Navarre, Ana Beltrán, said "the Government's action in Catalonia can be extrapolated to Navarre," because "both governments want a minority to crush a non-nationalist majority."

The class logic underlying this drive to military dictatorship in Spain was laid out in an analysis four years ago by the JP Morgan bank. It demanded the crushing of regional government structures across the Southern European "periphery" that emerged after fascist rule in World War II or, in the case of Spain, after the collapse of

the fascist regime in 1978, calling them obstacles to imposing anti-worker cuts.

It stated, “The political systems in the periphery were established in the aftermath of dictatorship, and were defined by that experience. Constitutions [reflect] the political strength that left-wing parties gained after the defeat of fascism. Political systems around the periphery typically display several of the following features: weak executives, weak central states relative to regions, constitutional protection of labour rights, consensus-building systems which foster political clientelism, and the right to protest if unwelcome changes are made to the political status quo. The shortcomings of this political legacy have been revealed by the crisis.”

After a decade of deep economic and social crisis in Spain and across Europe, the ruling class is moving to repeal all concessions made to the working class on social and democratic rights in the 20th century. Madrid and the EU intend for Article 155 to radically restructure class relations in Spain, imposing mass austerity and a national state of emergency and promoting Spanish nationalism to strangle popular opposition to austerity, militarism and authoritarian rule.

In an opinion piece for the conservative daily *ABC*, Isabel San Sebastián wrote, “It is necessary to thoroughly dismantle the civil fabric that for decades has encouraged secession through the region’s public television and radio, education and certain ‘cultural associations’ dedicated to indoctrination and agitation. We must take this opportunity to thoroughly clean the structures erected by the separatists in support of their cause.”

Such fascistic language has become the norm in the Madrid press. Madrid, the EU and the financial aristocracy are aiming for a violent confrontation with the population in Catalonia as well as in the rest of Spain, where there is deep opposition to Madrid’s turn to dictatorship. On Saturday, half a million people marched in Barcelona against Madrid’s arbitrary arrest of two Catalan nationalist politicians. In the following days, firemen, teachers and workers of the Catalan public television and radio system have declared they will not obey Madrid’s intervention.

The measures passed on Saturday by Rajoy’s cabinet are a direct threat to the 200,000 civil servants in Catalonia. One of them allows Madrid to issue orders that are “compulsory for the administration’s personnel... whether public officials or employees are subject to the labour regime” of the regional government. This was followed by threats of “disciplinary measures” against

workers who disobey, including confiscation of their assets and criminal prosecution.

The implementation of Article 155, representing the gravest threat of military rule in Spain and Europe since the end of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship in 1978, is exposing the bankruptcy of the political forces that for decades have passed as the Spanish “left.” They are working openly to tie the working class to the Rajoy regime and the moves toward dictatorship in Spain.

General Secretary Unai Sordo of the Stalinist CCOO (Workers Commissions) trade union, representing 1,139,000 members, signalled to Rajoy that there will be no opposition from Spain’s main union. He said that Article 155 “might be liked more or less,” but workers should “avoid any decision that might lead them to labour disputes.”

A crisis has erupted in Podemos, as increasingly large sections of the party back Madrid’s drive for dictatorship. Its general secretary, Pablo Iglesias, was forced on Monday to publish a letter to defend his position calling for a negotiated referendum and concessions to the Catalan nationalists as a way “for Spain to be viable as a political and territorial reality in the medium and long term.”

This has been attacked by leading Podemos members, who are demanding that Podemos drop even the impotent criticisms it has made of Rajoy’s plans. Founding member Carolina Bescansa said, “We would like us to speak more to Spaniards and not only to the secessionists.”

Similarly, the Podemos spokesperson in Andalusia, Esperanza Gómez, is backing Bescansa, stating that the party has “addressed [the Catalans] too much.” Luís Alegre, another founding member of Podemos, said that “a party with the aspirations of Podemos cannot give up the construction of a country project and has to look at the whole of Spain.”

The mass opposition that exists in the working class to a return to dictatorship will find political expression only through opposing the union bureaucracies and the “post-Marxist” populist parties of the affluent middle class like Podemos.



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