

As protests mount against Madrid, Catalan parliament declares independence

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As thousands of pro-secessionist protesters gathered outside, the regional parliament of Catalonia on Friday voted for a resolution on independence from Spain and the start of a “constituent process” to draft a new constitution for the Catalan Republic.

The balloting was carried out secretly so as to avoid prosecutions by the Spanish government. The independence resolution, declaring “a Catalan republic as an independent, sovereign, democratic and social state,” was passed with 70 votes in favor. These came from the secessionist parties—the Democratic European Party of Catalonia (PDeCat), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP)—with two abstentions within the separatist camp. The Podemos-backed Catalonia Yes We Can (CSQP) cast 10 votes against. Fifty-three lawmakers from Citizens, the Catalan Socialist Party and the Popular Party walked out of the chamber, branding the resolution illegal.

Outside the parliament, tens of thousands of pro-secessionist protestors waved *estelada* independence flags and placards demanding freedom for the two arrested separatist leaders, Jordi Sanchez of the Catalan National Assembly and Jordi Cuixart of Omnium Cultural. They cheered the announcement of the vote, chanting “Independence,” “The streets will always be ours” and “Not one step back.” In a room adjacent to the parliament, 200 pro-secessionist mayors celebrated the declaration.

Hours later, the Spanish government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced the Article 155 measures approved by the Senate the same day. These include the imposition of a regional government by Madrid, the removal of Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and all of his government’s regional ministers, the dissolution of the Catalan parliament, and

the calling of snap elections in the region.

Expecting a massive crackdown from Madrid, Puigdemont said to supporters following the parliamentary session, “In the days ahead we must keep to our values of pacifism and dignity. It’s in our, in your hands, to build the republic.”

Afterwards, thousands gathered in front of the Catalan government building in Plaça Sant Jaume to celebrate. Once the news was out that Spain had removed Puigdemont’s government, the main chant was “We are not moving!” in defiance of any attempt by Madrid to arrest the secessionist leaders. Town halls across Catalonia removed the Spanish flag, while the Catalan National Assembly urged regional civil servants not to cooperate with the authorities imposed by Madrid.

The PDeCAT spokesman in the Senate, Josep Lluís Cleries, declared prior to the announcement of the Article 155 measures that his party would not accept the resignation of the Catalan president and the rest of his government, and that it would remain loyal to the current government in Catalonia.

Spain is facing the worst political crisis since the collapse of the Franco regime in the 1970s amidst massive working class struggles. After a decade of deep economic crisis, social austerity and mass unemployment, the Spanish ruling class, with the support of the European Union and NATO, is using the independence declaration to move forward with its plans to repudiate the concessions in terms of social and democratic rights of the post-Franco period. Madrid is preparing to seize Catalonia with the backing of the Spanish army and police.

The danger of bloody repression is looming in a crisis of revolutionary dimensions. While broad opposition is emerging against such measures, it is critical to

distinguish two distinct forms of opposition, representing the interests of different social classes.

First, there is the opposition of the pro-independence factions of the Catalan capitalist class. This includes the PDeCAT, the ERC, the Catalan National Assembly and their petty-bourgeois allies, the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP). These forces are proceeding with an attempt to build a Catalan capitalist state within the framework of the European Union.

The same forces that have clamped down on protests and strikes by workers and youth over the years against their savage austerity policies in Catalonia declared cynically in yesterday's independence resolution: "The Catalan Republic is an opportunity to correct the current democratic and social deficits and create a more prosperous society, more just, more secure, more sustainable and more supportive."

The main constituency for the program of building a Catalan capitalist state is in better-off layers of the population. The last survey of the Catalan-funded Centre of Opinion Studies shows that 40 percent of those earning more than €1,800 a month—well over the regional average of €1,400 per month—support secession. Among those earning over €4,000 a month, it reaches 54 percent. But support for secession in sections of the population earning less than €1,800 per month falls to below 40 percent.

Their main institutional support is sections of the public administration and the regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra. The loyalties of the 17,000-strong regional police force, however, are divided between Barcelona and Madrid.

The secessionist methods of peaceful demonstration and "disobedience" against Article 155 are no match for the bloody crackdown being prepared by the Spanish state and its 122,000 military personnel, 77,400 Civil Guards and 87,900 national police. The Catalan nationalist parties are also politically isolated, as all of the major capitalist powers in Europe and North America support Madrid's moves to repression.

Spanish Attorney General José Manuel Maza is planning to bring charges of rebellion against Puigdemont, all of the members of his government and the Catalan parliamentary committee, which authorized the independence vote. Sources from the Office of the Attorney General told *El Confidencial* that legal action will be taken "against all of those who have

participated in the events."

This ambiguous formula allows for charges against hundreds if not thousands of secessionists and all those who opposes Article 155. The maximum penalty for rebellion is 30 years in prison.

The other form of opposition is the growing social opposition of the working class throughout Spain and throughout Europe against the return of authoritarian methods of rule. After four decades of fascist dictatorship under General Francisco Franco between 1939 and 1978, the working class has not forgotten the regime's brutality.

Hundreds of thousands of people have marched in Catalonia against Article 155 and the arrest of secessionist leaders. Different sections of the working class such as firemen, dockworkers, civil servants, teachers and employees of the Catalan public media have already shown their opposition to police state measures and the implementation of Article 155.

The Madrid-based media has bombarded the population for the past month with Spanish nationalism and sought to whip up a fascistic atmosphere in an attempt to break the resistance of the population to authoritarian forms of rule.

The opposition of workers in Catalonia to austerity and authoritarianism is part of a broader radicalization of the working class across Europe against social austerity and militarism that is proceeding rapidly. The way forward for the working class is to mobilize this opposition in the form of a unified political struggle against EU austerity and the drive to police state forms of rule, beginning with Rajoy's moves toward military rule in Catalonia.



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