

Catalan, Spanish workers face grave dangers from Madrid's repression

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2 November 2017

The Catalan nationalist parties are working openly with the Popular Party (PP) government in Madrid in return for hoped-for concessions from the European Union. The result of their efforts is to allow the Spanish regime to set a dangerous precedent for imposing its will by police-military fiat, with the full backing of the Socialist Party (PSOE) opposition.

Last Friday, the regional parliament of Catalonia voted for independence from Spain and the start of a “constituent process” to draft a new constitution for a Catalan Republic. Of the 135 deputies in the parliament, 70 from the Democratic European Party of Catalonia (PDeCat), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) voted in favour.

The nationalist politicians pledged to resist the threatened invocation of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution by the PP and to oppose attempts by Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to oust Catalan President Carles Puigdemont and his regional ministers, dissolve the Catalan parliament and organise snap regional elections.

Instead, the nationalists have agreed to participation in the snap elections called for December 21—a move that will place a seal of legitimacy on Spain's suspension of Catalan autonomy and rule of the region by decree.

Puigdemont and other ousted government ministers fled to Belgium, ostensibly to escape prosecution. But while there, Puigdemont repeated his appeals to the EU to intervene in the secession crisis by brokering a deal between Madrid and his deposed government. As a quid pro quo, he acquiesced in Rajoy's call for snap elections, which he described as a “democratic plebiscite.”

According to a *Radio Catalunya* journalist, Ernest

Marcia, speaking to the BBC, Puigdemont's endorsement of the elections indicated that secret talks are taking place between Puigdemont and Rajoy, mediated by the EU. “In my opinion,” Marcia said, “something is going on that nobody knows is happening, and probably Europe is intervening... Not publicly, they will not recognize anything. But Spain has done something that they didn't say a few weeks ago and Catalonia is accepting the authority of Spain, which is also very strange from the secessionist point of view.”

There is nothing strange in Puigdemont's actions. The Catalan nationalists' aim from day one was to whip up popular support for separatism, in part by exploiting legitimate grievances towards Madrid and the social unrest generated by austerity. But this was focused primarily on an appeal to middle-class layers, based upon demands that relatively prosperous Catalonia stop subsidising Spain's poorer regions.

Catalonia is Spain's richest region, representing a fifth of the country's gross domestic product. The aim of the separatist parties is to create a new mini-state, or at least accrue the necessary degree of independence to establish direct relations with the global banks, transnational corporations and the EU. The goal is to consolidate Catalonia as a low tax, free trade area based on the stepped-up exploitation of the working class.

Their mobilisations on the street were never more than a form of leverage to negotiate greater tax-raising powers and other concessions from Madrid. The Catalan nationalist parties have spent years imposing brutal austerity measures while sending the regional Catalan police to smash up strikes and protests.

But once the European Union and its governments pledged support for Rajoy's clampdown, a retreat was only a matter of time. On Monday, the PDeCAT and

ERC affirmed their abandonment of opposition to the December 21 elections and announced they would field candidates.

ERC spokesman Sergi Sabrià, while declaring the election “illegitimate” and “a trap,” added that “nevertheless, we are not afraid of the ballot box.”

The Catalan National Assembly, whose leader remains in jail on sedition charges, insisted it still “only recognises the Catalan Republic” and rejected Article 155, only to declare in the next breath it would call a meeting “before November 3” to decide on a “joint strategy” for the December 21 elections.

The petit-bourgeois Popular Unity Candidacy, CUP, which kept the ERC-PDeCAT coalition in power while acting as the most intransigent promoters of the bourgeois nationalist cause and hailing its supposed leftist credentials, was even more explicit, cavalier and criminal. “The Spanish state has neutralized us with intimidation and fear,” it complained.

“What has happened,” CUP spokesperson Benet Salellas concluded, is “that there has been an excess of improvisation in some of the actions during the last months.” He then reiterated support for Puigdemont, praising him for focussing on Brussels, which supposedly “internationalizes the massive violation of human rights,” and ended with a pathetic call for him to “approve the first republican decrees.”

The CUP’s Political Council is organising a meeting on November 4 to decide whether to support Rajoy’s elections and register before the November 7 deadline.

Those sections of the Catalan-speaking working class that lent support to the nationalists have drawn initial conclusions from the ongoing rout. Reports are that most public-sector workers, including teachers and fire fighters, as well as the regional police, have continued working after earlier indicating backing for a campaign of civil disobedience. The trade union bureaucracy is more than happy to climb down, with Intersindical-CSC declaring Monday that it has called off a threatened general strike.

This situation is fraught with dangers.

The nationalists first championed a divisive programme that helped create maximum confusion—dividing Catalan workers from those in Spain, and dividing Catalan- and Spanish-speakers in the region—at a time of universal opposition to the austerity agenda imposed by Madrid and Barcelona

alike.

Now, after the PP seized on an opportunity to mobilise the army and civil guard and impose rule by decree, they offer their services as a political gendarme in the hope of striking a new bargain with Madrid and Brussels.

The attempt by Madrid and the EU to impose a dictatorial regime, whether or not this is sanctioned by imposed elections, must be opposed by the entire Spanish and Catalan working class. The hand of the PP government has only been strengthened by allowing it to implement repressive and anti-democratic measures that will inevitably be employed against workers throughout Spain.

But an implacable struggle against Madrid and its EU backers can be waged only if it is entirely independent of the Catalan bourgeois parties and their reactionary agenda of national separatism.

A progressive answer to the crisis confronting the working class of Spain, whatever language is spoken, demands an end to all national divisions through the adoption of the perspective of socialist internationalism. Against a capitalist Spain and the plan to create a capitalist Catalonia, the working class must wage a unified struggle for the formation of workers’ governments in Spain and throughout Europe as part of the progressive socialist unification of the continent.



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