

Spanish army threatens to intervene in Catalonia as ministers are jailed

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After imposing Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to suspend Catalonia's elected government last week, Spain, backed by the European Union (EU), is rapidly moving towards a military regime. As High Court judge Carmen Lamela remanded into custody eight ministers of the Catalan regional government, Spanish armed forces chief General Fernando Alejandro threatened yesterday to attack Catalonia.

In the right-wing daily *ABC*, Alejandro affirmed that his plans for domestic military intervention are part of similar plans by NATO countries across Europe and North America. "Just like our allies," he said, "we are developing plans to, among other things, defend critical infrastructure, take action in response to catastrophes or crisis situations, react to external threats, fight terrorism or engage in collective defense in the context of the [NATO] Atlantic alliance."

Apparently to assure readers that the Spanish army is not preparing a coup, Alejandro immediately added: "Naturally, our plans take into account that the Armed Forces are tools serving the Spanish Nation, and that the executive branch must decide on the time and form of an intervention."

Alejandro stressed, however, that Catalonia was a target of Spanish war planning. He called the Catalan independence movement "the greatest threat to our democracy." To prepare the Spanish army for its tasks, he wrote, "I must take into account the accord adopted by the Senate on October 27, which noted 'the extraordinary gravity of the disobedience of constitutional obligations, and the carrying out of actions gravely contrary to the general interest, by the institutions of the Catalan regional government.'"

Having singled out the threat supposedly posed by Catalonia, Alejandro continued: "History shows that, if need be, Spain's people and also its armed forces know how to defend our Nation." Hailing Spanish soldiers "of all epochs," he declared, "Our history is replete with examples where the Spanish military put its love for Spain before all other considerations..."

Alejandro's claim that Catalan separatism is the greatest threat to Spanish democracy is an absurd political lie: the main threat comes from Madrid and the army.

His comments are a warning that Spain and the whole European Union (EU) are moving towards dictatorship. Alejandro's assurances that there will be no coup are an evasion. Madrid launched an all-out confrontation with Catalonia during the October 1 Catalan independence referendum, which it sought to block through a violent police crackdown. As it decapitates the Catalan government and tries to install its unelected viceroys in Barcelona in the face of mass protests, Madrid doubtless plans to rely on the security forces even more than during the referendum.

His praise for the Spanish army's role during "all epochs" is a chilling threat that must serve as a warning to workers across Europe. Over the last century, apart from its aggressive and bloodthirsty colonial wars in North Africa, the Spanish army has had only one target: the Spanish people. The last time the Spanish army marched into Catalonia, in January 1939 under the command of fascist Generalissimo Francisco Franco at the end of the Spanish Civil War, it carried out mass executions of its political opponents in order to crush revolutionary struggles of the working class.

The threat of domestic military intervention in Spain, amid a state of emergency in neighboring France and escalating demands for Internet censorship in Washington, is the product of a mortal crisis of capitalism. After a quarter century of escalating militarism and austerity measures since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and particularly since the 2008 Wall Street crash, the EU is discredited. With tens of millions of workers unemployed and living standards falling in much of Europe, the ruling class is terrified of rising social anger and moving towards dictatorship.

Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) government is ruthlessly attacking the Catalan bourgeois nationalists to show that no opposition will be tolerated. Independence referendums had been held peacefully in Quebec in Canada or in Scotland in the UK. Nonetheless, Madrid deliberately inflamed the Catalan conflict, assaulting peaceful voters during the October 1 referendum and then rejecting Catalan president Carles

Puigdemont's suspension of a declaration of independence and appeals for dialogue.

Madrid's main target is opposition in the working class, and in its assault on Catalonia it is acting with contempt for the Spanish people. Despite weeks of non-stop anti-Catalan propaganda in the press, polls suggest growing opposition in Spain to Madrid's crushing of Catalan self-rule. In a recent *El Mundo* poll, 57 percent of Spaniards and 76 percent of Catalans wanted a peaceful Catalan independence referendum to be held, whilst large majorities opposed independence.

Nevertheless, Madrid aims to seize the Catalan regional state apparatus and impose austerity and militarism at the behest of the EU, which has backed Madrid and demanded that—despite the Catalan crisis—it continue to cut social spending to meet EU budget deficit criteria.

Yesterday, Spanish courts jailed Catalan ministers including Oriol Junqueras (Deputy President), Jordi Turull (spokesperson), Raul Romeva (foreign affairs) and Joaquin Form (interior). Accused of rebellion, sedition and embezzlement over the October 1 referendum and the October 27 declaration of independence, they face up to 30 years in jail.

Ousted Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont and four regional ministers who fled to Belgium on Monday also face arrest. Spain's Public Prosecutor is demanding the High Court issue European Arrest Warrants. Charges of rebellion, sedition and embezzlement have also been levelled at the Catalan Parliament Speaker Carme Forcadell and five members of the Speaker's Committee.

This ruthless response was not meted out to one accused minister, Santi Vila, who resigned at the last minute before the independence vote last Friday. He was not jailed, but released on €50,000 bail. Vila was greeted with shouts of "traitor", "coward", and "now the police protect you" on his arrival at court. He is clearly being groomed as the contender in the December 21 election that Madrid has demanded be organized in Catalonia.

The only way forward to oppose the turn by Madrid and the EU towards dictatorship is the independent mobilization of the working class across Spain and Europe in a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist struggle—against not only Madrid and the EU, but also the Catalan nationalists.

The latter, having run pro-austerity administrations in Barcelona for decades, advance the reactionary perspective of building a separate capitalist state in Catalonia oriented to the EU.

While Madrid and the Puigdemont government are engaged in an increasingly bitter struggle against each other, they are also closing ranks against the working class. Both

are seeking a deal at the expense of the workers, based on the EU's ever more militarized austerity policy. In Brussels, Puigdemont repeated his appeals to the EU to broker a deal with Madrid, and acquiesced to Rajoy's call for December 21 elections, calling them a "democratic plebiscite."

A rally was organized by the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Òmnium in Barcelona. The city's mayor, Ada Colau, councilors of her Podemos-backed BComú coalition, the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT), and the petty-bourgeois Candidature of Popular Unity (CUP) attended. Colau proposed an amnesty and the annulment of Article 155 after the December 21 elections as "minimum points" for reconciliation and a return to "democratic normality" in Catalonia.

Colau's government has voted to recognise Puigdemont's administration as "the legitimate Government of Catalonia", rejected the application of Article 155 and "the authoritarian and threatening response of the State." It rejected a CUP motion to "recognize the proclamation of the Catalan Republic" on October 27.

Similar proposals are being made by strategists of the ruling class internationally. In an editorial, the *New York Times* wrote, "For the moment, Spain's prime minister, Mariano Rajoy, armed with the country's Constitution, appeared to have taken the upper hand". However, it warned, "Rajoy's unyielding stance could backfire if the standoff continues. The violent tactics of the Spanish police in trying to break up the referendum left bitter feelings in Catalonia, and more strong-arm tactics, should Catalans defy Madrid, could further shift sympathies—perhaps outside Spain as well".

The newspaper counseled de-escalation and relying on the bankruptcy of the union bureaucracy and its political allies, like the Podemos party, to strangle working class opposition. "Major trade unions and many civil servants appear likely to accept Madrid's temporary control," it wrote. "If Catalan parties are in fact prepared to participate in a new regional election, Mr. Rajoy should display magnanimity by apologizing for the behavior of the police on Oct. 1," the *Times* advised.

The basis of such a reconciliation would be an agreement of all of the parties on stepped-up military and police deployments and austerity measures in Catalonia and across Spain.



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