

No to dictatorship and national separatism! For the Unity of Catalan and Spanish workers!

Alex Lantier
21 December 2017

Today, Catalans are voting in the December 21 (“21D”) special regional elections called by the Spanish central government. These elections, held after the brutal police crackdown on the October 1 Catalan independence referendum and Madrid’s subsequent invocation of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to suspend Catalonia’s elected government, hold critical political lessons for workers in Spain and internationally.

They are confronted with a universal collapse of democratic forms of rule, rooted in the decay of international capitalism. In holding the 21D elections, the minority Popular Party (PP) government of Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, backed by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), is not trying to ascertain the will of the Catalan people. Rather, it aims to give a “democratic” veneer to the drive for police-state regimes and the rehabilitation of far-right forces across the European Union.

PP officials have stated that if voters in Catalonia elect a government Madrid opposes, it will invoke Article 155 again to suspend the resulting government. They are giving voters the “choice” to elect whatever government they wish, so long as it is the one Madrid wants.

The PP and its allies are trying to accustom the population to the holding of political prisoners and other arbitrary, dictatorial measures. Despite mass protests in Barcelona, they jailed Catalan nationalists Jordi Cuixart and Jordi Sánchez for calling peaceful protests, and threatened to remove Catalan language material from schools and television. Even as campaigning proceeds in Catalonia, deposed Catalan Vice-Premier Oriol Junqueras remains in jail—a fate deposed Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont escaped only by unceremoniously fleeing to hold talks with the EU in Brussels.

On this basis, the PP and its allies are preparing new

attacks on the workers. Already, after seizing Catalonia’s finances, PP officials have threatened to invoke Article 155 against the Madrid municipality, even as they bully it into imposing hundreds of millions of euros more in EU social cuts. The PP government backed protests for Spanish unity marked by the singing of fascist hymns, including *Cara al Sol*, and has publicly discussed imposing a state of emergency.

This collapse of democratic forms of rule is not, however, the product of Spanish conditions, but rather a European and international phenomenon, symbolized by the EU’s consistent support for Madrid’s crackdown.

The turn to state repression, the rehabilitation of militarism and the rise of far-right forces is proceeding across Europe. In France, the main police powers seized by the state during the two-year state of emergency, used to repress protests against an anti-worker labor law, have now been written into law. And four years after Berlin announced the remilitarization of its foreign policy, a far-right government has taken power in Austria, and a far-right party, the Alternative for Germany, has won seats in the German parliament for the first time since the Nazi defeat in World War II.

This crisis flows from an international collapse of capitalism that has matured over decades. The quarter-century since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union, eliminating the main military counterweight to imperialism, has been one of escalating wars, police repression and austerity. Particularly since the 2008 Wall Street crash, bourgeois democracy in Europe has begun to disintegrate amid rising social inequality and class and international tensions.

Inequality in Spain exemplifies the impact of this crisis on workers across Europe. Nearly a decade after the 2008 crash, unemployment in Spain is still at 17 percent (39

percent for youth), and social inequality is high. The top 10 percent now hold 57 percent of Spain's wealth, the bottom 50 percent only 7 percent, and the top 20 percent of families earn 761 times more than the bottom 20 percent. Europe's wealthiest individual, Spanish billionaire Armancio Ortega, is worth \$77.9 billion.

The resulting social anger and alienation from official politics have completely undermined the stability of the ruling establishment. This year, the EU's "Generation What" poll found that two thirds of Spanish youth, and over half of European youth, would join a mass uprising against the existing order.

This crisis cannot be resolved by electing one or another capitalist politician to pursue a different policy, accepting the framework of the EU and of capitalism. The turn is to the working class in Spain, Europe and internationally. The only viable response to the EU's move toward police-state rule is a turn toward an internationalist and revolutionary struggle for socialism.

Opposition to the Spanish state's repressive actions does not imply any support for the fundamentally reactionary policies of the Catalan separatist parties: the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), Together for Catalonia, and their petty-bourgeois allies such as the Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP). They imposed billions of euros in EU cuts on workers in Catalonia. One unanswerable proof of their reactionary role is their support for the EU, which is a tool for imposing austerity and building up European militarism. They have continued this support even after the EU Commission backed Rajoy's crackdown in Catalonia.

In the faction fight within the ruling class of the Iberian Peninsula, there are no progressive factions. The Catalan nationalists—like the Scottish nationalists in Britain and the Northern League in Italy—advance a selfish strategy based on the fact that Catalonia is a wealthier region. They aim for autonomy or independence in order to cut off their financial obligations to other, poorer regions of Spain, obtain a greater share of the profits extracted from workers in Catalonia, and deepen their ties to the international banks.

The predatory character of the Catalan nationalists' attitude to the rest of Spain, which repels and angers broad sections of the Spanish working class, makes it easier for Rajoy and his allies to whip up Spanish nationalism.

Like every great crisis, the Catalan crisis has revealed the role of petty-bourgeois parties such as Podemos, whose "left" demagoguery has been exposed. Far from

pursuing an independent policy for the working class, Podemos has sought to maneuver between the two bourgeois camps. Its Catalan branch, Catalonia in Common (CeC), claims to be neutral in the conflict between Catalan and Spanish nationalism and to advance instead the social question. It has proposed to support a coalition government between the PSOE's pro-Article 155 Catalan branch and the separatist ERC.

Podemos claims everything can be reconciled—regionalism and nationalism, Article 155 and democratic rights and, above all, the capitalist class and the workers. It shares much in common with its Greek sister party, Syriza ("Coalition of the Radical Left"). It too presented itself as a democratic alternative opposed to austerity. Once elected in 2015, however, it implemented austerity and is now actively suppressing the working class.

The way forward is a fight to unify Spanish and Catalan workers against both the Spanish and Catalan nationalist forces, as part of the unification of the European working class in struggle against the EU and European capitalism.

The only viable answer—in Spain as in every other country—is the reorientation of the working class on the basis of a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist perspective. Against all attempts to pit Spanish- and Catalan-speaking workers against each other, it is necessary to advance the struggle for power by the working class, the expropriation of the financial aristocracy, and the building of a workers state in Spain as part of the United Socialist States of Europe.

The struggle for this perspective requires the building of a new political leadership in the form of sections of the ICFI in Spain and across Europe.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact