

German Socialist Equality Party demands immediate release of Carles Puigdemont

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei
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The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) condemns the German authorities' arrest of Carlos Puigdemont and demands his immediate release. The former regional president of Catalonia was arrested Sunday morning by German federal police officers on an autobahn in the state of Schleswig-Holstein and detained in a facility in the town of Neumünster.

The arrest of Puigdemont by the German authorities is an arbitrary judicial act characteristic of an authoritarian regime. The German government and judiciary are serving as enforcers for the Madrid regime, which launched a brutal crackdown on the Catalan independence movement.

Puigdemont has committed no crime, but is being pursued for purely political reasons. The Spanish Supreme Court accused him on Friday, together with 12 other high-ranking Catalan politicians, of rebellion. The charge stems from their having carried out a referendum on Catalan independence, a promise they campaigned on during the previous election. To date, 25 Catalan politicians each face up to 30 years in prison.

Puigdemont's arrest recalls a grim episode from the past. This is not the first time German authorities have arrested a Catalan prime minister. In August 1940, in France, the Gestapo arrested Lluís Companys, who had fought against Hitler's ally Franco during the civil war. They extradited him to Madrid, where he was tortured, sentenced to death and executed.

The fact that Puigdemont is a political prisoner who also faces serious consequences is beyond question. A comment in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* entitled "Germany has its first political prisoner," acknowledged that Madrid is attempting to "decimate a democratic mass movement with prisons and fines." It

is "obvious that the Spanish judiciary's hardline stance is aimed at destroying the social and economic existence of the Catalan activists."

Only ten days after being sworn in, the German government is giving its full support to this anti-democratic policy with the arrest of Puigdemont. It is inconceivable that the Catalan politician's arrest could have occurred without authorisation at the highest political level. Last October, when the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy cracked down with brutal violence on the Catalan independence referendum, the German government fully endorsed Madrid's actions.

As *Focus* magazine reported, the Spanish intelligence service had Puigdemont under surveillance at all times. They informed Germany's Federal Criminal Bureau, which is under the direct control of the Interior Ministry. Puigdemont, who had attended a conference in Finland and driven through Sweden and Denmark by car on his way back to Belgium, was arrested by the federal police shortly after crossing the German border.

Germany's grand coalition backs the Spanish government because it is in full agreement with its goal of suppressing all social and political opposition. The strengthening of the police, expansion of the intelligence services and the transformation of Europe into a heavily-armed fortress form a substantial portion of the coalition agreement reached between Germany's Social Democrats and conservative parties.

This strengthening of the repressive state apparatus is directed not only against movements like the Catalan separatists, who notwithstanding their conflicts with Madrid advance a thoroughly bourgeois programme. Their main target is the working class. Puigdemont's arrest takes place in the context of growing social

conflicts and class struggles throughout Europe and the United States.

Two weeks ago, 45,000 people in Barcelona demonstrated for Catalan independence, and on Sunday evening, 55,000 took to the streets to protest Puigdemont's arrest. In France, railway workers and public servants are striking against President Emmanuel Macron's labour market reforms. In Germany, following strikes in the industrial sector, tens of thousands of public sector workers are now participating in warning strikes. In the United States, the largest student demonstrations since the Vietnam war took place over the weekend. Under conditions of a developing trade war with the United States, the growing war danger and the military build-up connected with this, these conflicts will intensify.

This is why the German government is giving its full backing to Mariano Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) government, whose origins lie in the Franco dictatorship that ruled Spain from 1936 to 1975. As in the past, far-right governments throughout Europe are working to erect police states based on terror to brutally suppress all forms of opposition.

Rajoy, whose minority government faced pressure from all sides, sent thousands of police officers from the hated Guardia Civil to Catalonia to launch a crackdown against voters in last October's referendum. After the separatists won new elections imposed by Madrid, Rajoy ordered one potential candidate after another arrested so as to prevent the election of a new regional president.

This repression enjoys the full support of Berlin, because the ruling class wants to suppress all social and political opposition to its reactionary policies. Puigdemont's arrest is directly connected with the enforcement of police state measures in Germany and across Europe.

The SGP reiterates its demand for the immediate release of Carles Puigdemont and calls upon workers, young people and serious intellectuals to bravely resist the establishment of an authoritarian regime.



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