

# Spain jails Catalan secessionist leaders, issues international arrest warrants

Alejandro López  
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Workers and young people must oppose the stepped-up state repression of the leadership of the Catalan secessionist movement directed by Spain's Popular Party (PP) government.

Friday saw the Supreme Court jail another five separatist leaders and order international arrest warrants for six exiled secessionists, including ousted regional premier, Carles Puigdemont.

Puigdemont was arrested yesterday in Germany while attempting to cross the border from Denmark.

The jailed leaders include Jordi Turull (former Catalan government spokesperson), Carme Forcadell (former Catalan parliament speaker), Raül Romeva (former regional external affairs minister), Josep Rull (former Catalan development minister) and Dolors Bassa (former Catalan labour minister).

They join Oriol Junqueras, leader of the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and former regional vice-premier, and the leaders of the secessionist lobby groups Catalan National Assembly and Òmnium Cultural, Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart, in jail since October.

The Spanish ruling class is intent on “beheading” the secessionist movement, as the Madrid-based media now routinely refers to the repression of the Catalan nationalist movement. “The Supreme Court decapitates the [independence] ‘process,’” wrote *El País*. “The Supreme Court decapitates the ‘process’: Without leaders, without investiture and without a road map,” declared *El Español*.

In addition to Puigdemont, Judge Pablo Llarena reactivated international arrest warrants against five more Catalan leaders living in self-imposed exile, and four former regional ministers, Toni Comín, Meritxell Serret and Lluís Puig, all of whom are in Belgium, as well as Clara Ponsatí, who is in Scotland. Police have said arrangements were being made for Ponsatí to hand herself in. The judge issued a warrant for Marta Rovira—the interim leader of the ERC, after Junqueras was sent to

prison—who fled abroad with her daughter Thursday night.

In total, 25 Catalan leaders are to be tried for rebellion, misuse of public funds or disobeying the state. Convictions could result in up to 30 years in prison.

The 69-page judicial statement presents the most spurious charges against the Catalan leaders.

Judge Llarena highlights every incidence of conflict since 2012, no matter how minor and without reference to the provocative role of the police and state forces, to assert the existence of a strategy of confrontation with the Spanish government. He states that the Supreme Court “characterizes violence by its physical nature, by personal expression, and for its appropriateness,” adding that violence must be “of a physical nature” requiring “the use of force” and must be exercised against “a person.” But he then claims that the “capacity for intimidation” is also “violence.”

Llarena also invents a new term, “acting violently”, which is “doing something in a violent manner, which does not present a typical content fully in agreement with acting with violence.”

Accusations of violence, directed against a largely peaceful civil protest involving the calling of an election, are a key element of the state's prosecution, as rebellion charges only apply to those who “violently and publicly” try to “abrogate, suspend or modify the Constitution, either totally or partially.”

The judicial action is the result of a criminal conspiracy between the Popular Party government, the Prosecutor's Office, the National Court and the Supreme Court, supported by the Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Citizens party.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy refused to accept the results of the December election last year, called after his government sacked the regional administration and imposed direct rule under Article 155 of the Constitution.

Rajoy hoped to install pro-Spanish-unity parties in

power on December 21, but this backfired after the separatist parties, Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia (JxCat), the ERC and the small pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) won a slim majority. The PP was almost wiped out and lost the anti-separatist vote to Citizens.

Rajoy has since extended Article 155 and said he will only accept a Catalan government which "accepts the rule of law", i.e., repudiates the perspective of unilateral separation. JxCat and the ERC both agreed to this diktat, but this has not saved them.

Puigdemont, the first choice for regional premier of JxCat and the ERC, was forced to withdraw his candidature after the Constitutional Court, in an unprecedented action, passed a resolution "to preventively suspend the investiture." The second option announced last week was Jordi Sánchez, the former leader of the Catalan National Assembly. He too was forced to withdraw his candidacy after the Supreme Court rejected his request to be freed from jail to attend the investiture ceremony. This contradicted a 1987 resolution by the same court allowing Juan Carlos Yoldi, militant of the Basque armed group ETA, to attend the Basque parliament to present himself as candidate for regional premier.

The third attempt was dashed on Friday. Once the rumors circulated that Jordi Turull would be the next candidate, the Supreme Court fast-tracked its decision summoning all accused parties to an arraignment hearing on Friday.

The secessionists reacted by calling for a parliamentary vote Thursday to ram through the election of Turull. Minutes before the parliamentary session started, however, the pseudo-left CUP—which plays a kingmaker's role in the secessionist camp with its four lawmakers—said it refused to back his bid arguing that Turull's proposed programme did not press hard enough for independence. On Saturday, the speaker of Catalonia's parliament suspended a scheduled run-off vote to elect Turull.

The crackdown on the secessionist movement provoked protests in Catalonia on Friday night. Thousands convened in the centre of Barcelona and major Catalan cities, in protests called by the CUP-dominated Committees for the Defence of the Republic, the Catalan National Assembly and Òmnium Cultural.

Riot police used batons to keep the demonstrators away from Spain's government offices in Barcelona. Emergency services said 35 people were injured in

clashes with police. Protests also spread in the Basque-speaking regions, with protests held in Pamplona and Bilbao calling for the release of the political prisoners.

The minority PP government is in deep crisis, incapable of passing this year's budget without the support of the Basque Nationalist Party and according to the latest polls, was overtaken by Citizens as the main right-wing party. It has only been able to proceed on its repressive path thanks to the supportive role of nominal "left" parties.

Socialist Party leader Pedro Sanchez responded to the arrests by describing the independence movement as a "bet for chaos", stressing that, "Nobody has done so much damage to Catalan institutions as the secessionist movement."

Irene Montero, spokesperson for the main pseudo-left group, Podemos, called for dialogue between the Catalan nationalists and the Spanish government, claiming that the judicial path "will not facilitate satisfactory outcome and lasting solution neither for Spain nor for Catalonia ... even in these difficult times we have to find the path toward dialogue and negotiation."

Such calls for moderation serve to demobilize opposition to Rajoy's repression and conceal its implications for the entire Spanish working class.

The repression against the Catalan nationalists takes place amid acute social tensions in Spain, revealed in last week's nationwide mass protests of pensioners, the clashes in Madrid Wednesday between police and migrants after the death of a street vendor and strikes like that by Amazon workers last week. Under conditions of mounting economic crisis, the ruling elite have no answer to social and political dissent other than a turn to authoritarian forms of rule.



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