

Spanish police attack protests demanding release of Catalanian leaders

Paul Mitchell, Alejandro López
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Protests have broken out throughout Catalonia following last week's Supreme Court ruling ordering 25 separatist leaders, including former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont, to be put on trial on charges of rebellion, contempt and embezzlement.

The protests have been met with bloody police reprisals. On Sunday, demonstrations organised by the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), controlled by the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP), led to clashes that left nearly 100 people injured. Catalan regional police shoved and hit demonstrators with batons to keep them from advancing on the office of the Madrid government's representative in Barcelona.

Throughout the week, the regional police repeatedly intervened to remove protesters blocking main motorways with burning barricades.

In Barcelona, demonstrators have attempted to close the Diagonal Avenue, one of the main city routes, with banners reading "Freedom for political prisoners" and "General strike!"

Puigdemont, who fled Spain last October following the declaration of independence, was arrested under a European Arrest Warrant in Germany on Sunday. He faces extradition to Spain and 30 years in prison. Spanish National Police have since arrested two Catalan policemen (Mossos) and a historian who accompanied Puigdemont and charged them with concealment, which carries a three-year jail sentence.

The 25 charged include 13 former ministers of Puigdemont's regional government. Among the charged are Deputy President Oriol Junqueras, the former Speaker of the Catalan Parliament, Carme Forcadell, and five members of her committee. Then there are the secretary general of the main separatist party, the Republican Catalan Left (ERC), Marta Rovira, the former chairman of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Omnium Cultural, Jordi Sánchez and Jordi Cuixart, and two

members of the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP)—Mireia Boya and Anna Gabriel.

On Wednesday, Judge Antonio Baños López at a Catalan court in Cornellà de Llobregat sent his investigation into alleged sedition crimes by seven Mossos police chiefs to the National High Court in Madrid.

Former Catalan Police Chief, Josep Lluís Trapero, is already being investigated by the National High Court for sedition. Baños López accused the whole Mossos leadership of likely acting "with the intention of directly attacking the form of government of the Nation, not limited to one jurisdiction but across the whole of the region of Catalonia."

The Spanish Popular Party (PP) government led by Mariano Rajoy has deliberately inflamed the crisis in Catalonia by instigating its onslaught against secessionist politicians.

Until this action was taken, the Catalan ruling elite had capitulated at every step since independence was declared last October and Rajoy responded by imposing article 155 of the Constitution deposing Puigdemont's government and taking control of the region.

The separatists endorsed the fraudulent snap elections imposed by Madrid last December to install a pro-Madrid government. And once they won a slim majority, Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia (JxCat) and the ERC abandoned their unilateral declaration of independence.

The last candidate to stand for regional premier, former government speaker Jordi Turull—currently in jail—did not even mention independence as an aim in his programmatic speech last week.

Before he was arrested, Puigdemont, speaking at an international human rights film festival in Geneva, suggested that independence was not the only option: "Maybe, the Swiss model is the most efficient and

attractive,” he said.

Others have resigned their political posts, declared that the independence vote was purely symbolic and repeated calls for “dialogue.”

Their abject prostration proved that their main concern was always about extracting concessions from the central government, similar to those already granted to the Basque region, to facilitate the development of Catalonia as a low-tax and low-wage investment platform for the major corporations and banks.

However, this has only emboldened Rajoy to go ahead with more repressive measures as a means of building an authoritarian regime.

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Rajoy’s escalation of the Catalan conflict is an expression of the advanced nature of police-state preparations, amid the acute social tensions revealed in nationwide mass protests of pensioners, clashes in Madrid between police and migrants after the death of a street vendor, and strikes like those recently mounted by Amazon workers. A hard-line stance, with Rajoy taking on the mantle of a national strongman in the Franco mould, is considered essential to the survival of his minority government, battered by endemic corruption cases and, according to the latest polls, in danger of being permanently eclipsed by Citizens as the main right-wing party.

Under conditions of mounting economic and political crisis, the ruling classes in one country after another are seeking pretexts or mounting provocations to move ever more openly toward authoritarian and dictatorial forms of rule to suppress growing social and political opposition. However, Rajoy could not go ahead with his plans if it was not for the active collusion or acquiescence of what passes for the left in Catalonia and Spain.

In Catalonia, the CUP and the Committees for the Defence of the Republic, and various groups orbiting around it such as Revolutionary Left, Workers’ Revolutionary Current and Class Struggle, have called for a “general strike.” But such calls have thus far fallen on deaf ears in Barcelona’s red belt, where many are Spanish speakers and are hostile to separatism. The CUP et al. are distrusted precisely due to their promotion of nationalism, thus blocking any independent movement of the working class against attempts to pit Spanish and Catalan-speaking workers against each other.

In Spain, millions of workers and youth, appalled at the buildup of an authoritarian state, have faced the continued

efforts of the pseudo-left Podemos to demobilise all opposition to the PP by corraling workers and youth behind a policy of putting pressure on Madrid and Barcelona to begin negotiations, while Rajoy continued his policy of repression.

Last Sunday, Podemos spokesperson Irene Montero again called for dialogue, claiming that the judicial path “will not facilitate a 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.”

Now Podemos is preparing to strangle the numerous protests that are being called in the coming months in defence of public health care, against precarious jobs and poverty, higher pensions and for a basic rent. In the words of Podemos Secretary of Organization, Pablo Echenique, “The role of Podemos has to be to support the mobilisations and formulate public policies so that the issues the protests raise on the street become institutional work.”

The Socialist Party (PSOE), which Podemos appeals to to lead the formation of a “left government,” was even clearer on what it thought of the recent protests against Puigdemont’s arrest and the jailing of Catalan leaders. Yesterday, PSOE Organisational Secretary José Luis Ábalos, described the Catalan Committees for the Defence of the Republic as the “germ of the Kale Borroka.”

Ábalos’ comments are part of a campaign mounted by the right-wing press to justify their plans for further repression in Catalonia and throughout Spain. From the Basque meaning “Street Fighting,” Kale Borroka refers to urban guerrilla actions carried out by Basque nationalist youth aligned with the petty-bourgeois armed group ETA in the 1980s and 1990s. Their most common actions included attacks on offices of political parties, burning cars, attacking housing, and destroying ATMs, bank offices, public transport and rioting using Molotov cocktails. Against such insurgent forces, Spain has a long record of brutal repression.



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