# Spanish parties unite to demand repression against Catalan nationalists

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Leaders of the ruling Popular Party (PP), the right-wing Citizens and the Socialist Party (PSOE) are using limited street protests as a pretext to demand Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy steps up repression against Catalan nationalists.

On Monday, Citizens' leader Albert Rivera called on Rajoy to use "all necessary means to protect judges, prosecutors, public officials, police and, in general, honest and decent Catalans" from "the violent separatist commandos who are organising in Catalonia."

Rivera added, "Violence cannot condition daily life and sow terror among people," claiming that Citizens party members "have felt the increase in pressure and harassment" in recent days and requested police protection. He did not reveal who these members were, saying that doing so would mean giving "clues to the enemy."

Rivera failed to note that the most violent act in the past week was an arson attack on Thursday against a community centre in Sarria, Barcelona, popular among Catalan separatist youth, which left the premises practically "unrecoverable." Nazi and Francoist symbols and slogans were daubed on the walls.

Rivera's comments were followed by a statement by the secretary of organization of the Catalan section of the Socialist Party (PSC), Salvador Illa, demanding the regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, "stop" the CDR's "insurrectional acts."

On the same day, the deputy secretary of Social and Sectorial Policy of the PP, Javier Maroto, said that the Committees for the Defence of the Referendum (CDRs) "remind" him of "Kale Borroka"—the "Street Fighting" undertaken by Basque nationalist youth aligned with the armed separatist group ETA in the 1980s and 1990s.

Rivera, Illa and Maroto made their demands in the context of a handful of protests over the Easter break in which supporters of the CDRs occupied motorway toll booths and dismantled the barriers, allowing cars to pass for free. The CDRs, which are dominated by the pseudo-left Candidatures of Popular Unity party (CUP), describe their protests as "active pacifism as a way of transforming society" to "build the Republic."

According to the *Spain Report*, the protests were "negligible." The Catalan traffic authorities told the online news source that "the effect on traffic flow was relatively minor, with alternate routes in place at all three of the protest spots."

Within hours of Rivera making his comments, the Public Prosecutor's Office at the National High Court in Madrid announced it was launching an investigation into the CDRs. Their actions were described as "intolerable," amounting to rebellion, sedition and embezzlement. These are the same charges levelled at former regional premier Carles Puigdemont and his ministers and officials for declaring independence in October and for which they face sentences of up to 30 years in jail.

The prosecutor's office said it was working with the police and High Court judges to "actively investigate" the activities of the CDRs. The office is accusing them of being linked to a broader plan to "subvert the constitutional order, defending and praising people who are being investigated by the courts for the gravest crimes that can be committed against a social and democratic state of law, such as rebellion."

The CDR campaign only came back to life after weeks of relative inactivity following the arrest of Puigdemont in Germany on March 25 and his threatened extradition to Spain, and the rounding up of several separatist leaders by Spanish judges.

The Catalan separatist movement has been overwhelmingly peaceful. Massive annual demonstrations, attracting more than 1 million people, have always ended without incident. The first real signs of violence started the day Puigdemont was arrested, with

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protests around the region leaving 100 injured, including 23 police.

On Monday, Puigdemont spoke for the first time since his arrest urging Catalans not to be provoked, saying, "We cannot let down our guard before a state that is becoming more and more authoritarian and that is curtailing our rights."

Maroto's comments about the "Kale Barroka" are ominous. Spain has a long record of brutal repression against Basque separatism. In 2000, the PSOE and PP modified the Criminal Code to designate Kale Borroka as low-level terrorism, which allowed offenders including minors to be judged by the High Court, normally reserved for terrorism and organised crime cases with sentences of up to 18 years in prison.

In 2002, the two parties colluded to pass the Parties Law allowing the High Court to ban political groups "which attack this democratic regime of liberties,…or politically support the violence and activities of terrorist groups, complement or politically support the action of terrorist organizations, with the purpose of subverting the constitutional order, or seriously alter the public peace, terrorise the public authorities or certain individuals or groups."

Another amendment to the Criminal Penal Code was enacted to punish anyone who made an "apology for terrorism." The maximum period of detention was increased to five days in which suspects can be locked up in solitary confinement, prevented from communicating with third parties and from receiving visits from private doctors or relatives.

By defining the latest incidents as Kale Borroka, the Spanish state is seeking to bring to bear the whole anti-terror legislation, built over decades against ETA, against Catalan nationalists.

The Catalan crisis is being used to criminalise all political and social opposition under conditions of intensification of the class struggle. Aware that their militarist and austerity policies are deeply unpopular, the ruling elite and its parties are seeking to mobilise far-right forces, the police, and the army.

No confidence can be placed in any section of the ruling establishment to oppose the government's authoritarian policies.

Podemos, the main pseudo-left group in Spain, has sought to defuse the deep-seated opposition among workers and youth to the developing of an authoritarian state. This in a country which lived under military, fascist or monarchist dictatorships for up to two-thirds of the 20th century. They have demobilised all opposition to the PP government by corralling workers and youth behind a policy of putting pressure on Madrid and Barcelona to begin negotiations with the Catalan separatists, while Rajoy continued his policy of repression.

At the same time, they plead incessantly with the PP's partners in crime, the PSOE, to form a new government of "progress" in coalition with Podemos. The party has remained silent on the campaign by the press and the main parties over the alleged violence in Catalonia.

The Catalan nationalist parties, Puigdemont's Catalan Democratic Party (PdeCat) the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC) and their political shadow, the CUP, are incapable of opposing the PP's authoritarian agenda. Their sole aim is to secure increased benefits for the regional bourgeoisie through a negotiated settlement with Madrid granting them greater tax raising powers and the retention of a larger share of revenues. To attract investment, they have imposed savage austerity on the Catalan working class, while playing the nationalist card to secure political support—especially among layers of the middle class. The net result is to divide and demobilise the working class.

For the same reason, the Catalan nationalists cannot count on the support of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV), which is involved in backdoor negotiations with the Rajoy government to pass this year's budget for its own benefit. While formally opposed to supporting Rajoy's budget until Article 155, imposing direct rule from Madrid, is lifted from Catalonia, the PNV has not called for any protests in the Basque Country where traditionally tens of thousands have been mobilized against the crackdown on democratic rights by Spain.

The only means of opposing Madrid's repression in Catalonia and the plans for authoritarian rule throughout Spain is the development of a unified movement of the working class.

Workers throughout Spain, including Spanish and Catalan-speaking workers in Catalonia, must wage a common political struggle, against all the parties of big business and the capitalist state apparatus and in defence of democratic rights and for socialism.

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