

Spanish police harass, spy on Catalan separatist party

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The Catalan separatist Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP) party has publicly denounced a coordinated and overt campaign of police spying directed against it.

At a press conference last Thursday in front of CUP headquarters, National Secretary Núria Gibert and former deputy Mireia Boya explained that the police have been spying on them for over a year, since before last October's Catalan independence referendum, and are continuing to do so.

Boya said that "the repression is from well before last September [when the crackdown on Catalan secessionists started]." She continued: "To this day, we are suffering police monitoring of our headquarters. There are undercover policemen watching us, watching and monitoring each one of our movements."

In the course of the press conference, various CUP members showed photos to the media of the alleged spies. According to Boya, the "undercover officers write down notes and take photographs of those who come in and out of the premises."

It would be unusual if the police carried out physical surveillance without also systematically intercepting phone calls and digital communications.

Boya said the espionage targeting the CUP has been reported to the Interior Department of the Catalan regional government, so that the regional police, the Mossos d'Esquadra, can investigate. They have not yet received a reply, however.

The CUP warned that they intend to find out who has ordered the spying and why, "since this is a serious violation of democratic rights and freedoms." According to Boya, there are "1,200 people persecuted by the Spanish justice system, with eavesdropping, espionage and monitoring."

Gibert recalled last year's siege of CUP headquarters, when police tried to enter the building without a

warrant during the September 20 crackdown, in the course of which high-ranking civil servants were arrested for preparing the October 1 independence referendum. When the CUP refused, and crowds of people started a sit-down protest in front of CUP headquarters to keep police from entering, the cops provocatively stood outside the premises for eight hours in full anti-riot gear (See video).

This action was part of Madrid's strategy to provoke violence. A clash would have allowed the judiciary to frame the Catalan referendum as an act of "rebellion," which, under the law, must involve a public show of violence. The intervention of hundreds of protesters to peacefully defend the headquarters thwarted this attempt. However, it did not prevent Madrid from charging Catalan nationalist leaders with rebellion after the referendum, even though they had constantly appealed for the protests to be peaceful.

Gibert said their complaint filed last year had been rejected by the judge, but that they have appealed the decision.

Boya announced that the CUP will undertake "new legal measures" against "the Spanish state over serious violation of fundamental rights."

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) opposes and denounces the police spying and repression of the CUP and the Catalan nationalists. The ICFI has unbridgeable and well-documented political differences with the CUP. Its bourgeois separatist programme and promotion of nationalism divide working people on the Iberian peninsula, and its support for Catalan pro-austerity governments underscores its hostility to the working class. However, police spying and threats against the CUP violate democratic principles and basic democratic rights, and establish a precedent that will be

turned most savagely against the working class.

Claims that the CUP is a terrorist group and an instigator of violent attempts to overthrow the state are a political fraud. Over the past year, the CUP's activities against Madrid's repression of the Catalan nationalist movement has consisted of peaceful protests, strikes, blockades of roads via sit-ins and the display of yellow ribbons throughout major cities and towns.

Madrid's violence is well documented, however. Under the previous right-wing Popular Party government, supported by the Socialist Party, the state sent 16,000 policemen to storm polling stations, assault peaceful voters and confiscate ballot boxes and voting papers to try to halt the October 1 referendum. This left over 1,000 injured, including children and elderly people.

In the weeks before the referendum, over 100 websites were closed, ballots were confiscated, millions of posters and leaflets were seized, newspapers were searched and meetings were banned.

Madrid-based media overwhelmingly endorsed these anti-democratic and repressive measures. Official chauvinism reached levels not seen since the fascist dictatorship of Generalissimo Francisco Franco.

The media hailed far-right protestors gathering in front of police stations and calling for Spanish police to "go for them" [the Catalans]. The press depicted them as concerned citizens defending Spanish unity.

Spain's right-wing ABC even called for the banning of the CUP and its youth wing, Arran. In an editorial, it stated: "The law of political parties allows the banning of a party once it has been demonstrated that it engages in antidemocratic and unconstitutional behavior, without the need to charge it with a specific crime."

Soon after the referendum, Madrid dissolved the Catalan regional government, imposed an unelected regional government, and moved to arrest the main secessionist leaders. Apart from those such as former Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont who fled to Belgium, the rest are still in jail.

Anna Gabriel, a CUP leader and former MP, fled to Switzerland, having left the country believing she could not get a fair trial from the Spanish judiciary.

Her suspicion was confirmed last week when eldiario.org posted leaked messages from several Spanish judges' corporate email accounts. One October

6 email read: "As a Spaniard, a Catalan and a judge, what happened on September 6 and October 1 was a coup d'état ... You can't negotiate with those who carry out a coup, nor engage in dialogue with them."

Another judge said that "a coup has winners and losers," and stated that "the bloodshed that [pro-independence leaders] aimed for can't go unpunished." Several messages slandered the Catalan nationalists as Nazis. "It's the same that occurred in Germany long ago," reads one comment.

Another judge hailed king Felipe VI and the police agencies, writing, "Long live the Spanish police, long live the Guardia Civil, long live Spain and long live the colleagues who truly look after our legal system."

The repression has continued under the Socialist Party (PSOE) government, backed by the pseudo-left Podemos party. While calling for "dialogue" with the Catalan separatists, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has threatened to re-invoke article 155 and dissolve the Catalan regional government. He has ordered the new attorney general to continue prosecuting Catalan nationalists under fraudulent rebellion charges.

Within Catalonia there is mass opposition to the ongoing repression. Up to one million protesters joined a mass march in the streets of Barcelona on September 11, Catalonia's National Day, calling for the release of those in jail and return of those exiled.

The operation against the CUP is a transparent attempt to step up the state terror campaign targeting any and all opposition to Madrid under conditions of a growing radicalization of the working class against social inequality, militarism and police repression.



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