

Dozens injured as Catalan separatists and regional police clash in Barcelona

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1 October 2018

On Saturday, ahead of today's one-year anniversary of the Catalan independence referendum, dozens of demonstrators were injured and six were arrested in clashes with regional police in Barcelona.

A year ago, Madrid deployed 16,000 police in a failed attempt to suppress the referendum by violently assaulting peaceful voters, including the elderly. With tacit European Union support, the central government threatened direct military intervention. It proceeded to jail Catalan nationalist politicians and impose an unelected government on the region.

Since then, despite mass protests in Barcelona, successive governments, led first by the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and then by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE), have continued Madrid's reactionary course in Catalonia. The current social democratic government is doing so with the support of Podemos.

Saturday's clashes erupted after Catalan regional police intervened to separate a separatist protest organised by the Committees for the Defence of the Republic (CDR), a group close to the Catalan nationalist Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP), from a rally backing the national police.

The pro-police demonstration was organized by Jusapol, an association of national police and civil guards that demands equal pay between Spain's two nationwide police forces and Catalonia's regional police. The aim of the demonstration was to pay tribute to the crackdown on the October 2017 referendum.

Jusapol President Natan Espinosa provocatively declared that his organization wanted to "honour those who worked to preserve the unity of Spain." A leader of the far-right Vox party, Javier Ortega, also participated in the Jusapol rally.

The Jusapol demonstration marshalled some 3,000 protesters. They chanted "Long Live Spain" and "Go Get Them!"—a reference to slogans shouted by far-right

demonstrators in support of national police units that were deployed to Catalonia on the eve of the referendum.

The CDR counterdemonstration mobilized over 6,000 people. The separatist protesters shouted at the Spanish police supporters, "October 1, We Neither Forgive Nor Forget," "Get Out of Here, Fascists!" and "Independence!" The right-wing demonstrators responded by shouting, "We Will Be Victorious!" "Long Live Spain" and "Our Cause Is Just!"

Clashes reportedly erupted when CDR protesters tried to confront the pro-police rally. When the regional police cordon blocked them, the demonstrators sprayed coloured powder and threw eggs at the regional police.

The Catalan police responded by charging with batons in at least at three different locations, leaving at least 24 injured, of whom six were hospitalized. Videos and images on YouTube show police hitting protesters above the waist and in some cases on the head—violating police regulations.

The regional Catalan Home Affairs minister, Miquel Buch, defended the actions of the Catalan police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, saying on Sunday "We managed to avoid bigger problems. Such a clash could have become very violent." However, he admitted that some policemen did not behave "according to protocol." The CUP, which has historically supported the current Catalan ruling parties, has urged the minister to resign.

Barcelona Mayor Ada Colau of Podemos-backed Barcelona en Comú spoke on Catalunya Radio to say: "I make a call for calm... This city has always defended the right of everyone to exercise the right to free speech." Keeping silent on the pro-police rally's far-right character, Colau appealed for law and order, saying Barcelona had requested more police officers to fight against "insecurity."

Saturday's violent clash reflects the explosive political and class tensions created by the PP government's

crackdown in Catalonia. A year after the 2017 Catalan independence referendum, none of the issues that led the Catalan nationalists to call the independence referendum, and Madrid to order its repression, have been resolved.

A strike wave is developing across Spain and Europe amid growing anger over austerity and the militarist policies of the EU and Madrid. With the installation of a new PSOE minority government backed by Podemos and the main Catalan nationalist parties, the class gulf separating the entire political establishment and masses of working people has come to the fore.

PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has in all essentials continued the PP's policies of militarism and police state repression, while broaching a few symbolic concessions. He has declared his sympathy for Catalan autonomy and floated proposals for investing €500 million in Catalan infrastructure. At the same time, however, the PSOE government, which is maintained in power by the support of Podemos, has kept Catalan nationalist prisoners in jail and retained "rebellion" charges against nine incarcerated Catalan leaders. The charges carry sentences of up to 25 years in jail.

The reactionary policies of the PSOE and Podemos have exposed the bankruptcy of the main Catalan nationalist parties, Together for Catalonia (JxCat) and Catalan Republican Left (ERC), both of which backed the June no-confidence vote that installed the PSOE government.

The pseudo-left CUP and its appendages, such as the Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (WRC), are responding with calls to implement the so-called "mandate of the October 1 referendum." With a 92 percent vote for independence on a turnout of only 43 percent, less than 40 percent of voters supported independence. Nonetheless, the CUP and the WRC are agitating for the Catalan nationalists to secede from Spain, criticizing JxCat and the ERC for seeking only "a return to regional normality and protecting investments of the large Catalan companies."

The CUP and the WRC know that the Catalan nationalists have no base in the working class, any more than the Spanish ruling parties, and they fear the growing radicalization among workers.

The WRC's *Izquierda Diario* website calls on the Catalan nationalists to "expand their base" by going to the "factories, offices and working-class neighbourhoods." This, they claim, will "add the bulk of the Catalan working class to this democratic struggle, [which will] return to the streets much renewed and with a political programme that solves the serious democratic and social

problems." They add, "It is necessary to link the struggle for the Catalan Republic with the struggle to end precarious employment and the low salaries of young people, women and immigrants."

In fact, the past year has shown that a Catalan secessionist perspective, which divides Catalan and Spanish-speaking workers, is a trap for workers opposed to the police state policies of the EU and Spain. Those who dress it up in "left" colours, like the CUP, have long records of voting for austerity budgets proposed by the main Catalan nationalist parties. These parties are violently opposed to mobilizing the working class and oriented to the sordid political manoeuvres in Madrid.

JxCat and ERC have threatened to withdraw support from the PSOE government and let it collapse if Sánchez refuses to discuss self-determination and fails to free the jailed Catalan nationalists. However, they have not acted on this threat, fearing that new elections might bring to power the PP and the Citizens Party, which are calling on Sánchez to again impose an unelected government in Catalonia.

The political bankruptcy of all these forces vindicates the statement the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) released last year on the eve of the referendum. It warned that opposition to repression "cannot be mounted under the grip of the ruling parties in Madrid or the Catalan nationalists, who are unflaggingly hostile to the working class."

The ICFI insisted that the "division of the Spanish working class by the building of a new capitalist state in Catalonia, governed by parties with a long record of supporting war and imposing austerity, offers workers nothing. It would separate Catalan workers from their greatest ally against Madrid's onslaught: the entire Spanish and European working class."

The only viable policy against the danger of war and dictatorship, the ICFI wrote, "is to fight to unify the working class in Spain and Europe in a struggle against capitalism and for the socialist reorganization of society. This can be carried out only in revolutionary struggle against all of Spain's bourgeois factions."



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