

Podemos backs Madrid's plans for repression against Catalonia

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Last Friday, Podemos General Secretary Pablo Iglesias announced his party would back repressive measures against Catalonia if it were part of a Socialist Party (PSOE)-led government. Iglesias said this days ahead of the dissolution of Spain's hung parliament, after six months of political deadlock since the April 28 elections, and with protests against state repression in Catalonia expected in coming weeks.

Speaking to *Antena 3* television, Iglesias said that if acting Prime Minister and PSOE leader Pedro Sánchez invoked Article 155 of the Constitution to dissolve the elected Catalan regional government, and Podemos was in a coalition government with the PSOE, Podemos would support it. "I wouldn't anticipate events," he said, "but in any case, we will be with the law and, if we were in government, we would support the leadership of the PSOE." He added, "of course, the Catalan issue is not going to be resolved by judges alone."

This is a barely veiled endorsement of repression by Popular Party (PP) and PSOE governments after the police crackdown on the October 1 Catalan independence referendum. It exposes the cynical and false character of his criticisms of the previous, PSOE-backed PP government's invocation of Article 155 in Catalonia. In fact, Podemos is on board with preparations for repression by the ruling class.

In October 2017, the PSOE-supported PP government in Madrid approved direct rule in Catalonia after a violent police crackdown on the 2017 Catalan independence referendum. Article 155, which had never been used previously, had been called the "nuclear option" against the Catalan nationalists. The Article states that if a regional government "does not comply with the obligations of the Constitution or other laws it imposes, or acts in a way that seriously

undermines the interests of Spain", the Spanish government can rule the region directly.

The PP government used this measure to forcefully dissolve the Catalan elected government and call elections in the region under the jackboots of thousands of police and security forces. There was open discussion in Spanish media of using direct rule by Madrid in the region to curtail the Catalan language's presence in the schools, abolish the region's police force, and suspend Catalan public radio and television, which were accused of being hotbeds of Catalan nationalism.

This was followed by the arrests and detention of dozens of Catalan leaders, civil servants and activists, many of whom had done nothing more than help organize peaceful protests. Nearly two years later, 12 are still in pre-trial detention, awaiting sentences to be announced in coming weeks. These sentences are expected to be heavy and to trigger mass protests in Barcelona.

Under the PP, the Spanish bourgeoisie unleashed a wave of reactionary Spanish chauvinism not seen since Francoism, and built up the neo-fascist Vox party. Since a parliamentary coalition of Podemos and the Catalan nationalists installed a PSOE government in power in 2018, the "indefinite" imposition of Article 155 has become the rallying call of the PP, Citizens and Vox. This would mean the indefinite suspension of elected regional government in Spain.

Last week, as the major parliamentary parties blamed each other for not having formed a government, however, Sánchez lashed out at the separatist Republican Left of Catalonia, warning he could invoke Article 155 to remove the regional Catalan government "if you attempt to violate the Constitution."

The opposition of Podemos to these reactionary

policies was always nominal, as it made no attempt to mobilize broad and growing opposition among workers to state repression—instead preferring toothless, pro forma criticisms of the right-wing PP, and calls for alliances with the PSOE. Last July, Iglesias even pledged “full loyalty” to the PSOE on all state questions, including foreign policy and the Catalan issue. This was a sign of tacit support for state repression.

Today, Iglesias is moving further to the right amid plans for a police crackdown on protests against the jailing of Catalan nationalist politicians, who could face up to 25 years in jail. Polls show that, despite the relentless anti-Catalan propaganda in the Spanish media, only 32.6 percent of Spaniards and only 11 percent of residents of Catalonia support the imposition of Article 155, whereas large majorities advocate resolving conflicts through talks between Madrid and Barcelona.

The statements of Iglesias are a warning to the international working class: pseudo-left forces like Podemos or figures like Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn or Bernie Sanders in the United States are aligning themselves with plans for mass repression amid an upsurge of class struggle and social protest in Spain and internationally.

Strikes have erupted in recent months in the transport sector affecting railways, subways and airports. Last Friday, ground staff of Iberia started a four-day strike, forcing the company to cancel 206 flights. On Saturday, thousands of metalworkers from the Basque Country protested in the streets of Bilbao to demand salary increases, an end to externalizing workers to temp companies, and wage equalisation between women and men at the workplace. On the same day, pilots and cabin crew from Ryanair renewed their strike action.

This growing working class militancy coincides with expectations of mass protests against the ruling to be handed out to the 12 Catalan leaders in pre-trial detention.

Expecting large protests, the Catalan regional police—under the control of the Catalan nationalists—have recently announced that they are preparing various plans to repress protests against the ruling, as well as hiring more anti-riot police and buying new riot gear. At the same time, they are

stocking up pepper gas, metal fences and lights to dazzle the protesters. Pepper gas is an unprecedented tool in the armory of the Catalan police, though it is commonly used by French and German police.

The record of Podemos shows that the struggle against the return of authoritarian forms of rule can only proceed by building a new revolutionary leadership in the Spanish and international working class. It requires a ruthless political break with Podemos-style parties which, based on the postmodernist and anti-Marxist “left populist” theories, speak for reactionary layers of the upper-middle class deeply integrated into the state machine.

While the ruling class has promoted these parties as “left” organisations, they have nothing to do with left politics in terms of political orientation and outlook. The privileges of the union bureaucrats, “left” academics and media pundits that are these parties’ social base are entirely bound up with the institutions through which the class struggle was strangled in Spain and across Europe since the 1970s. Amid a breakdown of the parliamentary democratic regime set up after the Transition from the fascist Francoite regime in 1978, they are moving sharply to the right.

Defeating this turn toward fascistic and authoritarian politics requires mobilising the working class internationally in a struggle against the entire capitalist political establishment, to take power and expropriate the capitalist class. This requires building a Trotskyist vanguard in the working class, sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International in Spain and every country.



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