

Madrid steps up repression of protests against Catalan crackdown

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Acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's Socialist Party (PSOE) government, backed by the entire political establishment, from the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and Citizens to Podemos, is escalating police-state measures against mass protests in Catalonia and across Spain.

Last Friday, over half a million people protested in the centre of Barcelona for the liberation of nine Catalan nationalist political prisoners sentenced to a combined 100 years in jail. The region was paralysed by a general strike. The protest mobilized significant layers of the population who oppose secessionism, but nevertheless oppose the incarceration of the Catalan nationalists for holding the peaceful independence referendum of 2017. Broad sections of youth and workers oppose the police state emerging in Spain and Europe.

The next day, 4,000 anti-fascist protesters marched in Madrid, calling for the freeing of the political prisoners and shouting, "Madrid will be the deathbed of fascism," "Solidarity with the peoples of Catalonia." The police violently dispersed the protest, leaving over 26 injured. There were similar protests in Valencia, Oviedo, Palma de Mallorca, Sant Sebastian and Bilbao.

The ruling class is terrified that protests will erupt across Spain and beyond, linking the defence of democratic rights to the growing upsurge of the working class in defence of public education, healthcare, pensions and jobs. One in two Spaniards earns less than €900 and one in five children does not have their most basic needs met, while the number of millionaires has increased fivefold in the last nine years, according to Credit Suisse.

Significantly, the European Union (EU) is backing Madrid's repression, by publicly refusing to take any position on the Catalan crisis. A petition to examine it in the European parliament was voted down, 118 to 229.

On Sunday, the PP regional premier of Madrid, Isabel Díaz Ayuso, called on the delegate of the government responsible for public order to ban pro-Catalan

demonstrations in Madrid "until violence ceases completely in the streets of Catalonia." Ayuso ended her statement by supporting repression by police and paramilitary Civil Guards in Catalonia.

Media headlines hysterically glorify police as victims of savage violence. It is filled with pro-police headlines: "The riots in Barcelona, from a police van" (*El País*); "Police violence? It's the other way around, they are massacring us and we are containing ourselves," (*El Confidencial*); "Flowers, pizzas, ham and energy drinks for the Police in Barcelona: 'You are not alone'" (*El Mundo*); "Police ran out of rubber bullets: 'It was the only thing that worked last night'" (*El Confidencial*); "The WhatsApp audios of the police in the riots of Barcelona: 'this is fucking hell, they attack us with chainsaws'" (20 Minutos); "The gesture that excites the Police in Catalonia: flowers after six days of violence and 300 injured officers" (*El Español*); and "A minor's letter to the police officers deployed in Catalonia: 'I hope this nightmare ends'" (Antena 3).

Spanish television stations are heavily promoting Santiago Abascal, the head of the fascist Vox party. In recent weeks, he has appeared on Telecinco's "El Programa de Ana Rosa," one of the most watched morning shows in Spain. He also was invited to the popular night show of Pablo Motos, who hosts *El Hormiguero*, a television programme with comedy, science, and guest interviews. The Abascal interview obtained a 23.5 percent screen share and 4 million viewers.

In disgust, millions in Spain and throughout the world are taking to social media pages on Facebook and Twitter to understand what is happening. According to official reports, there have been over 600 injured, four people have lost eyes to rubber bullets, over 194 have been arrested and 28 sent to jail without bail.

The entire political establishment is closing ranks

behind the pro-police campaign. The right-wing parties, PP, Citizens and far-right Vox, have demanded the PSOE send in more police, take control of the regional Catalan police through the National Security Law and remove the Catalan government by using Article 155 of the constitution. Vox is calling for declaring a state of emergency and sending in the army.

On Sunday, Spain's acting interior minister, Fernando Grande-Marlaska, said that 288 police officers were injured in the weekend street violence. He called on Catalan regional premier Quim Torra to condemn violence and publicly support the police forces.

On Monday, acting Prime Minister Sánchez made a lightning trip to Barcelona to visit the police headquarters and the hospital where the injured police officers were recovering. There Sánchez was booed and shouted at by the hospital's staff, who chanted "freedom for the political prisoners," "you should be ashamed of yourself" and "leave, leave." Sánchez refused to visit any of the protesters injured in the disturbances.

Sánchez also refused to meet with Torra. Since Saturday, Torra has been trying to telephone Sánchez, and the latter has decided not to take the call. Both the press and the Spanish government accuse Torra of not condemning violence, and therefore being complicit in the clashes.

These are early indications that the Spanish government does not recognize Torra as a legitimate official of the Catalan government, an indication that Madrid is preparing more repressive measures like Article 155.

Pseudo-left Podemos is also participating in the pro-police hysteria. On Friday, Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias denounced youth protesters as violent. Yesterday, Alberto Garzón, leader of the Stalinist United Left, a major party in the Podemos parliamentary alliance, tweeted to a hospitalized police officer: "This is awful. I hope this police officer gets better and fully recovers. It is intolerable that this uncontrolled violence without end endangers people's lives. We have to end this situation and only politics can do it."

Madrid has also escalated the repression on the Catalan nationalists, whose ultimate target is the working class. Spanish National Police raided the headquarters of the Catalan Association of Municipalities for Independence—an organization of town councils and other entities created to obtain Catalan independence—for money-laundering. On the same day, the house of Gonzalo Boye, the lawyer of self-exiled former regional Catalan premier Carles Puigdemont, was searched on

drug-trafficking charges.

The National Court is also investigating the on terrorism charges Tsunami Democratic, the social media platform used by protesters to coordinate their actions.

Despite its hysteria, the pro-police campaign has had little effect in Catalonia. On Sunday, Citizens leader Albert Rivera was only able to gather 1,500 supporters in the centre of Barcelona for a right-wing Spanish nationalist protest. There, Rivera said he wants to be the prime minister after the November 11 elections to "jail those who want to break this country."

Three weeks before the November 11 elections, large sections of the population are expressing their disillusionment with the political establishment. According to the latest poll from right-wing newspaper *La Razón*, a record 35 percent of the population would abstain. An *El Mundo* poll last week shows the PSOE would win 121 seats of the 350-seat parliament and 27 percent of the votes, two fewer seats than in the elections of April 28. Podemos would get 32 seats with 12.5 percent of the votes, losing 10 seats.

The greatest electoral beneficiaries would be the right. The Popular Party would receive 97 seats, 31 more than in the previous elections, and 21 percent of the vote. The far-right Vox would receive 36 parliamentarians, 12 more than in April, on 11.5 percent of the vote. This would make Vox the third-largest party in parliament.



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