

Mass rally against jailing of Catalan nationalists in Barcelona

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Two weeks before the November 10 Spanish general elections, hundreds of thousands marched in Barcelona Saturday afternoon in a renewed protest against the show trial and sentencing of nine Catalan politicians and activists to 9 to 13 years in prison.

Police said 350,000 people joined the rally called by the pro-secessionist Òmnium Cultural and Catalan National Assembly organisations, and backed by the Catalan secessionist parties: Together for Catalonia (JxCAT), Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and Candidatures of Popular Unity (CUP). The count was likely an underestimate by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) caretaker government's police force. Attendance was similar to a march two years ago that police at that time said mobilized 750,000.

Protestors marched under the slogan "Liberty!", against repression of previous protests by Spanish national and Catalan regional police that has been backed by the entire political establishment, from Citizens and the Popular Party (PP) to the pseudo-left Podemos party. Since the verdict, whose draconian sentences against Catalan nationalists for taking peaceful political action threaten basic democratic rights, tens of thousands have marched each day. So far, over 2,000 demonstrations have been held in the two weeks since the verdict.

Clashes have left over 700 people injured, 200 protestors arrested of which 31 sent to prison without bail, and four protestors having lost eyes to rubber bullets shot by the police.

Saturday night ended in violent clashes with police. After the demonstration, the secessionist Committees for the Defense of the Republic called a protest near Barcelona's police headquarters that gathered over 10,000. As they marched, they were met by hundreds of police in full riot gear. Tensions flared when Catalan

regional police, the *Mossos d'Esquadra*, provocatively drove 5 anti-riot vans through the middle of the crowd. This triggered clashes that left over 46 injured.

Speaking to *La Vanguardia*, Catalan nationalist Miquel Buch, the Catalan Minister of Interior who runs the Mossos, defended the violence against demonstrators. Portraying the Mossos' repression of protesters together with PSOE-led national police as Catalan patriotism, Buch said he "wouldn't allow [Madrid] to take away control over the Mossos" by invoking the National Security Law. He added, "public order work bothers many people, but to have self-government means being willing to have political responsibility for the police."

Hundreds of thousands have marched twice in little more than a week. Just nine days ago, over half a million people marched through Barcelona while strikes in several industries paralysed Catalonia.

A movement of youth and workers is developing against the police state emerging in Spain and across Europe. According to numerous reports and analyses, these protests are attracting more and more protestors who are hostile to secessionism but are primarily enraged by Madrid's austerity and attacks on democratic rights.

On Saturday in *La Vanguardia*, academic Manuel Castells wrote: "Barcelona burns. But also Santiago in Chile. And Hong Kong. And Quito. And until recently Paris. [...] The causes are diverse, but the reactions and the transition of the peaceful movement to confrontation with the established order are very similar." Castells said the "common thing" is that "the State has closed ranks and responded with the riot police and the army."

The show trial of the Catalan nationalists, he wrote, "has outraged a majority of the Catalan population,

including those who are not secessionists.” He concluded by warning of “the political frustration of an entire generation that feels betrayed not only by the Spanish state but also by the secessionist leaders.”

Even the pro-PSOE daily *El País*, which has been rabidly hostile to the protests in Catalonia and has defended the vicious crackdown on the protests as an issue of “public order,” had to admit that the youth fighting police “were mobilised by the verdict, but their reasons are beyond separatism.” It interviewed five young protesters, all of whom denounced escalating attacks on democratic rights, police-state repression, and their precarious jobs and social conditions.

As this rising opposition turns also against the Catalan nationalists, the unions are working to isolate the protests. Last week two largest trade unions in Spain, the social democratic General Union of Labor (UGT) and the Stalinist Workers Commissions (CCOO), declined to participate in the march; the Catalan UGT said it would invite its members to the march, but that it would not participate under its banner.

On Sunday, the right-wing anti-secessionist Catalan Civil Society (CCS) organisation provocatively held a protest against Catalan nationalism. It gathered only 80,000 protesters, according to police.

PSOE government ministers who participated in the CCS demonstration, which had the full support of the Madrid-based media, marched along leaders of the PP, Citizens and the far-right VOX party. As they marched before police headquarters on Via Laitena in Barcelona, the marchers greeted and thanked the police.

Two years ago, the CCS was able to rally 450,000 protesters to its protests due to mass frustration among workers with the Catalan nationalists’ secessionist agitation. This year, however, its march failed to garner similar support for police repression and the jailing of political prisoners. It is another clear indication that layers of the population hostile to Catalan nationalism and opposed to the creation of a pro-NATO Catalan capitalist mini-state now refuse to back the PSOE.

The social-democratic PSOE’s decision to march alongside the fascistic VOX party is a warning. It is yet another confirmation that, faced with a global upsurge of class struggle, the entire ruling class is turning in a fascistic direction. As the WSWS warned, powerful forces in the ruling class seized on the 2017 Catalan

independence referendum—itsself a manoeuvre by pro-austerity Catalan nationalist parties to divide the working class and seek better terms for their financial relations with Madrid and the EU—to shift official politics far to the right.

The PSOE spearheaded this campaign, first by backing the PP minority government in its 2017 crackdown on the Catalan referendum. Put in power last year by a parliamentary maneuver of Podemos, the PSOE continued the PP’s austerity and militarist policies, while overseeing the show trial of the Catalan nationalists and promoting Spanish chauvinism. This year the PSOE escalated repression, arresting Catalan activists on fraudulent terrorism charges and sending thousands of police to Catalonia to suppress resistance to its reactionary verdict.

If the PSOE can proceed unchallenged with repression, it is due above all to the reactionary role of Podemos. Its General Secretary Pablo Iglesias has pledged loyalty to the PSOE and called on the population to accept the verdict in the Catalan show trial.

Yesterday, Podemos Organisation Secretary Pablo Echenique cynically stated that “Podemos is the party which is maintaining coherence in this campaign.” He urged PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez to choose the “repressive line of [PP leader Pablo] Casado and [Citizens leader Albert] Rivera” or the line calling for “dialogue” that he claimed is advanced by Podemos.

The greatest beneficiary of this campaign has been Vox, whose leader Santiago Abascal is receiving wall-to-wall media coverage. According to yesterday’s electoral poll released by *El Español*, if the general elections were held today, the PSOE would win 117 seats, six fewer than last April. The PP would gain the most, rising from 66 to 101. Vox would achieve its best-ever result, ending third with 38 deputies, 14 more than in April.



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