EU lifts ex-Catalan regional premier Carles Puigdemont's parliamentary immunity

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The European Parliament has lifted the immunity of three Catalan parliamentarians, including former Catalan regional premier Carles Puigdemont. This is the first step to secure their extradition to Madrid, where they could face over a decade in jail for calling peaceful protests and a referendum on Catalan independence in October 2017.

In a vote Tuesday, 404 European Members of Parliament (MEP) of the liberal, conservative and social-democratic blocs supported a resolution sponsored by the fascist Vox party's European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) group. It lifted the immunity of Puigdemont and former MEPs Antoni Comín (former Catalan regional health minister) and Clara Ponsatí (former regional education minister). Against the resolution, there were 247 votes, and 42 MEPs abstained. The ruling Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the right-wing Popular Party, Citizens and Vox parties voted in favour.

This unprecedented decision is a warning to the European working class. Europe's principal parties of rule have joined forces to pass a resolution originating from Spain's leading fascist party to persecute Catalan lawmakers, lobbied for by the PSOE, with the active complicity of the pseudo-left Podemos party. The EU thus gave its political seal of approval to Madrid's fascistic anti-Catalan campaign, the main means through which the Spanish ruling class has intervened to shift politics far to the right.

Amid mass death resulting from its "herd immunity" policy on the COVID-19 pandemic—that is, the premise that profits must take precedence over human life as over 800,000 people died in Europe—the European ruling class is backing the anti-Catalan campaign. Underlying this is the Spanish bourgeoisie's view that, in the final analysis, it agrees with Madrid on the need to build a police-state regime across Europe. The central target, is not the bankrupt bourgeois and secessionist perspective of the Catalan nationalists, but the rising militancy and strikes among workers and youth.

The report was approved last month by the EU parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs submitted by Bulgarian MEP Angel Dzhambazki, infamous in Bulgaria for his anti-LGBT, anti-Roma agitation. Fifteen MEPs of the committee voted in favour, with eight opposing and two abstaining.

After Vox's report was passed, the PSOE government took it up. Iratxe García, leader of the social-democratic bloc in the EU parliament, the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, said soon after the vote: "I want to thank the work that the Spanish Socialist delegation has done in recent months to guarantee the success that we have had in this vote today."

Hours after the vote, Spanish Supreme Court Judge Pablo Llarena—the judge who has led the persecution the Catalan nationalists since 2017—asked the EU Court of Justice (CJEU) for a preliminary ruling on how to interpret an extradition order for the MEPs under EU law.

This aims to prevent the Belgian judiciary from rejecting European arrest warrants against the three Catalan MEPs. In January, the Belgian courts refused to extradite another former member of Puigdemont's regional Catalan government, Lluís Puig. The Belgian judge rejected the Madrid's Supreme Court requests, stating it lacked authority to request the extradition and try Puig. Moreover, it claimed, there were no guarantees that Spain's Supreme Court would respect Puig's fundamental rights, such as the presumption of innocence.

Spain's judiciary, backed by the whole state apparatus, hopes that the EU Court of Justice will back its anti-Catalan campaign, overturning the Belgian court's rulings. Llarena could issue a new European arrest warrant if the CJEU ruling supports his case. Minutes after the EU parliament's decision, moreover, a Spanish court revoked the open prison regime granted to seven Catalan political prisoners fraudulently convicted for their involvement in the 2017 referendum and peaceful protests.

The EU's backing of the anti-Catalan campaign also exposes the Catalan nationalists. After the EU parliament's vote, Puigdemont said: "European democracy has lost. We have lost our immunity but the European parliament has lost

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much more. It's clearly political persecution."

In fact, the EU has continuously backed Madrid's police-state policies since the mass crackdown on the Catalan referendum in 2017, which left over 1,000 peaceful voters injured. This has not prevented the Catalan nationalists from continuing to promote illusions that the "democratic" EU would intervene to halt the Spanish bourgeoisie's police-state measures in Catalonia. In fact, the EU is escalating its support for Madrid's police-state campaign.

Within Spain, the main Catalan separatist party, the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), continues to be a critical prop of the minority PSOE-Podemos government—voting for Spanish state budgets—even as the government continues to incarcerate several of its top officials, including ERC leader Oriol Junqueras.

The Catalan nationalists are pro-austerity, pro-NATO forces, fearing the working class far more than they do persecution by Madrid.

They have joined hysterical denunciations of youth protests against the PSOE-Podemos government's incarceration of rapper Pablo Hasél. The law-and-order campaign, spearheaded by Vox, has received full backing by the Catalan nationalists. Miquel Sàmper, regional Minister of the Interior in the Catalan regional government for Puigdemont's Together for Catalonia (JxCat) party hysterically declared that "combative communism" and a "large number of common criminals" lead these protests.

After hundreds of thousands demonstrated in Barcelona against the jailing of Catalan nationalists in 2019, the Catalan nationalist parties and associations are not calling significant demonstrations against the EU's decision. Clearly, they fear that the youth protests will intersect with and radicalize the widespread opposition to the Spanish bourgeoisie's police-state measures.

Above all, the lifting of the Catalan leaders' immunity exposes yet again the bankruptcy of Podemos. While they tried to cover themselves by voting against the resolution at the EU parliament, they are partners in the PSOE-Podemos government which backed Vox's resolution in the EU. Podemos is itself part of the rapidly-emerging police-state regime in Spain.

In July 2019, Iglesias pledged "full loyalty" to the PSOE on all state questions, including foreign policy, and thus including state repression in Catalonia. Months later, when a dozen Catalan leaders were fraudulently found guilty of sedition, Iglesias said: "Everyone must abide by the law and accept the verdict." At the time, streets of cities across Catalonia were filled with tens or hundreds of thousands of demonstrators.

Similar pseudo-left parties are accelerating the drive to police state forms of rule across Europe. The French allies of Podemos, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unsubmissive France party, voted several provisions of the reactionary, anti-Muslim "anti-separatist" law in parliament. The German Left Party has for its part joined in the anti-migrant campaign waged by the German state and police apparatus.

While the pandemic initially produced a lull of the anti-Catalan campaign, it has suddenly been whipped in the past months amid growing opposition to the PSOE-Podemos government's "herd immunity" policy on the pandemic, which has left over 100,000 dead and 3.2 million infected in Spain.

In October, Spanish police ludicrously claimed that Russia planned to invade Catalonia in 2017 to support the secessionists, advancing wild and unsubstantiated allegations that the Kremlin offered Puigdemont 10,000 soldiers to deploy across the region. That same month, Spain's Supreme Court upheld an 18-month ban from public office on Catalan regional premier Quim Torra on fraudulent disobedience charges, removing him from power.

Over the past months, Podemos has become the main instrument through which Spain's increasingly fascistic ruling establishment implements policy. The Podemos government is increasingly adopting Vox's programme, relentlessly persecuting migrants, incarcerating Catalan leaders and rappers, and denouncing youth protests. At the same time, it is showering corporations and banks with €140 billion thanks to Vox's support in parliament and downplaying coup threats from sections of the military which are discussing their support for the murder of "26 million" leftists.

The role of Podemos in the anti-Catalan campaign confirms warnings made by the WSWS: Podemos' claims to represent a "progressive" faction of the Spanish political establishment are political lies. The working class cannot "pressure" the "left populists" in Podemos to obtain social concessions, a less callous and repressive policy, or a scientifically-based approach to combat the virus. They are themselves closely associated to the bourgeoisie's drive toward police-state forms of rule.

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