

Spain's CUP to enter pro-“herd immunity” Catalan regional government

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The Catalan-nationalist Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) is preparing to enter a regional government in Catalonia prepared to impose policies of herd immunity, austerity and police repression of social opposition. It illustrates the reactionary role of the CUP and all the middle-class tendencies who have promoted its false pretensions to being an “anti-capitalist” force.

On March 26, after regional elections, the CUP voted for the Republican Left (ERC) candidate for regional premier, Pere Aragonès, renowned for his defence of privatisations and austerity. The ERC is one of Catalonia's main bourgeois parties, with a long record of leading and supporting regional pro-austerity governments while backing Socialist Party (PSOE)-led governments in Madrid. It is the main prop in the Spanish parliament of the PSOE-Podemos minority government, which is still holding its leader, Oriol Junqueras, in jail, as part of the Spanish ruling classes' fascistic anti-Catalan campaign.

As ERC-CUP's combined 42 seats were insufficient in the 135-seat parliament. ERC is now negotiating with the right-wing separatists Together for Catalonia (Junts) to form a majority around Aragonès.

The CUP's decision came after 60 percent of its members voted for a pre-accord on a government with ERC. Previously, the CUP remained outside of Catalan regional governments, supporting their austerity budgets when their votes were necessary, but nominally remaining independent and making pro forma criticisms. Now, they are being directly integrated into the capitalist government.

Mass discontent is mounting worldwide against the ruling class' homicidal “herd immunity” policy that has led to 2.8 million deaths worldwide, 100,000 in Spain, and an economic catastrophe for workers. Teachers are fighting the unsafe return to in-person schooling. In France and Britain, protests have erupted against police

violence. Last week, thousands of Amazon workers participated in the first-ever nationwide strike in Italy. Within Spain, mass youth protests erupted against the incarceration of Stalinist rapper Pablo Hásel.

The CUP's entry into capitalist government aims to disorient this opposition and defend a “herd immunity” policy prioritising profits over human life. This emerges in the 16-page pre-accord document .

Remarkably, the COVID-19 pandemic is barely mentioned. The word “pandemic” appears twice, one in the introduction to briefly mention that it is occurring, and the other to deny, on a feminist basis, that the official response was insufficient. It states how the “pandemic has shown us that the work-life balance model within Europe has failed miserably in its objectives. Not because it remained insufficient, but because it is focused on maintaining the woman's role as caregivers.”

The word “COVID-19” appears once, in the section dealing with Public Health. It calls for “Increasing or, as a minimum, maintaining and stabilising the current staff numbers in primary health care and retirement homes and retaining the staff contracted for COVID-19.”

The CUP proposes no measure to contain, let alone stop the spread of the virus, though Catalonia has been badly hit due to the policies the ERC-led regional government coordinated with Spain's PSOE-Podemos executive. The region has seen 530,000 of Spain's 2.3 million infections, that is, 23 percent of the cases though Catalonia has only 16 percent of Spain's population.

This omission underscores the CUP's tacit endorsement of “herd immunity” policies. During the pandemic, it has refused to call for closing universities, schools and nonessential workplaces, with full compensation to all those unable to work, and significant investment in essential workplaces to ensure they are safe. Speaking for privileged sections of the upper middle class, the CUP finds itself increasingly opposed to measures to fight the

pandemic.

Its call to reach 25 percent of the health budget for primary care is empty rhetoric, and the program gives no figures or proposals on how to reach such an objective. However, the ERC claimed last September that it would seek to increase the primary care spending by €125 million a year. But then it would take 40 years for primary care spending to reach 25 percent of total spending.

Another key aspect of the pre-agreement is the CUP's endorsement of police-state repression of social opposition. It devotes an entire chapter to public order measures aimed at strengthening anti-riot police against the population.

This includes developing "new internal instructions" for "proportional" repression of protests. This entails endorsing mass violence against workers and youth. Foam bullets are to be suspended "until the protocol [for their use] is made public." It adds, "we will demand that the protocol is strictly abided by and that it does not violate fundamental rights." Are workers who lose eyes to foam bullets supposed to be glad that they lost their eyes according to protocol?

The CUP's ruthlessness against protesters must be taken as a serious warning. In a previous period, they would have called—at least on paper—for dissolving anti-riot police and ending the bloodiest forms of state violence. Now, they are joining the state apparatus on the explicit basis that working class opposition to "herd immunity" policies must be violently suppressed to guarantee the profits of the economy and the assets of the propertied classes.

One last point must be made on the CUP's Catalan separatism. The media habitually promotes the CUP as the most "radical" separatist group in Catalonia, for its call to build a new capitalist state in Catalan-speaking regions in Spain and France. For the past decade, they pressed Catalan nationalist parties like ERC and Junts to commit to an independent state. The CUP has now relegated this to an indefinite future.

It states, "the CUP and ERC commit ourselves to generate the conditions and agreements necessary to propose a new democratic onslaught [against Spain]. This will be based upon what secessionist forces agree on ... and accumulation of social and political forces to make this effective, prioritising the path towards a referendum of self-determination."

While their separatist program has no progressive, let alone socialist content, its removal from the accord further underscores that its perspective was bankrupt from the

outset. Their secessionist plan to carve up a linguistically homogeneous pro-NATO, pro-EU Catalan capitalist state, run by pro-austerity parties, is now to be shelved to work with Madrid on a "herd immunity" policy, austerity and police-state repression. In the end, in both projects their main concern is to maintain profits for its affluent middle-class social constituency.

The CUP's pre-agreement brings to a close another strategic experience for the international working class with petty-bourgeois parties claiming to be a "radical" alternative to capitalism. This includes Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the CUP in Catalonia.

All of these parties began to grow, or were created, after the youth and working-class protests in Europe that followed the Egyptian Revolution in January 2011. They were the undeserved beneficiaries of social anger at years of hardship and savage austerity measures imposed by the social democrat-led governments in the aftermath of the 2008 global capitalist crisis. All of them have led to disaster for the working class.

The CUP's entry into government on a "herd immunity" program also exposes the myriad pseudo-left forces that have traditionally oriented to it, including Spain's Morenoite Workers' Revolutionary Current (CRT).

For the past decade the CRT called for a "critical vote" for the CUP. The CRT abandoned this because the CUP ran a right-wing, law-and-order, pro-business campaign proposing to shower big business with billions. Instead, the CRT posted 20 articles, made speeches in demonstrations and even intervened on prime time public television to attempt to convince the CUP not to enter into an ERC government—thereby unintentionally exposing not only the CUP but also itself as tools of Spanish capitalism.



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