

PSOE-Podemos debates pardon for Catalan-nationalist political prisoners

Alejandro López
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In the coming weeks, the Socialist Party (PSOE)-Podemos government is expected to offer pardons to nine Catalan separatist leaders, fraudulently sentenced to between nine and thirteen years in jail over their role in the October 1, 2017, Catalan secessionist referendum.

Last week, anticipating a report on the pardons by Spain's Supreme Court, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said at a press conference in Brussels that "vengeance and revenge" are not among the "constitutional values" he defends. Instead, in reference to pardons, he defended "concord, understanding, dialogue and respect for the law."

In the coming week, Sánchez has continued to imply the pardons will be offered in the coming weeks. Yesterday, he said "We will make the decision in conscience, not thinking of those affected but of the millions and millions of Catalans and Spaniards who want to live in peace."

The discussion over pardons, however, has nothing to do with "peace" and "dialogue." It is part of back-door negotiations between factions of the ruling class in Madrid spearheaded by PSOE and Podemos, backed by liberal media outlets like *El País*, and the Catalan nationalist forces ruling the region, the Catalan Republican Left (ERC) and Together for Catalonia, over the disbursement of billions of euros in European Union bailout funds and attacks on the working class to pay for it.

It comes barely weeks after the PSOE-Podemos government submitted the "Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan" to the European Commission on how Madrid will disburse billions of euros to its banks and corporations. It also came on the same week that all 27 EU countries ratified the legal instrument that underpins the bailout fund, paving the way for money to reach national governments by July.

Spain's regions will play a prominent part in the disbursement of the funds. In 2021, it is expected that the regions will manage around 54 percent of Madrid's allocated bailout fund, around 18.7 billion euros. Catalonia is the second region on the list.

The bailout funds from Brussels are soaked in blood. Last

July, as European governments ended the initial lockdown imposed across much of Europe in the spring of 2020 due to a wave of wildcat strikes across Italy that spread to other countries, including Spain, France and Britain, they designed multi-trillion-euro bailouts, transferring mass amounts of public wealth to the financial aristocracy.

While they all shouted in unison that there was no money for a shelter-at-home policy against the virus, including subsidizing workers and small business, they agreed to funnel €750 billion to the banks and corporations, and bank bailouts of €1.25 trillion from the European Central Bank, along with a new seven-year €1 trillion EU budget. Spain was one of the most benefitted, receiving €140 billion.

The initial price to be paid was the reopening of the economy and opening schools, prioritising profits over human lives. What the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson blurted out bitterly, "No more f***ing lockdowns, let the bodies pile high in their thousands!" became the official EU policy.

So far, it has cost the lives of over 1.1 million people throughout Europe. Meanwhile, as millions of workers suffered hardship, unemployment, poverty, mass death, social isolation, mourning and suffering, European billionaires reaped \$1 trillion according to Forbes.

Capitalist governments are preparing a new round of austerity against the claims of the trade unions and pseudo-left forces like Podemos that these funds came without "strings attached." France is preparing to cut unemployment benefits by 240 euros. In Spain, the PSOE-Podemos government is in advanced stages of a pension reform that will extend retirement age, a labour reform making redundancies easier and VAT tax increases affecting disproportionately the working class.

The pardons are an attempt to come to terms with the new Catalan regional government which runs the second wealthiest region in the country. The PSOE-Podemos government has signed up the Catalan nationalists to implement the draconian social cuts that, together with mass deaths, are underwriting this massive bailout of the financial

aristocracy and the major corporations.

The Catalan government recently formed by the coalition of the ERC and Together for Catalonia has pledged to implement austerity, attacks on the working class and de-facto abandon secessionism, keeping it for rhetorical purposes only. Its new economy minister is Jaume Giró, a former banker at Caixabank.

The new Catalan regional premier, Pere Aragonès, made clear what was behind the pardon debate. On Wednesday, Aragonès said “Our proposal is an amnesty, but we are also clear that we will not oppose any measure that can alleviate the pain of the prisoners, their families and Catalan society.” He then said that he would phone Sánchez in the coming days to discuss the round table on the Catalan crisis and the management of the European funds.

On Sunday, interviewed by the Catalan nationalist daily ARA, Aragonès insisted that his government’s priority was the bailout funds. He said it “is one of the issues that will be on the agenda of my meeting with the Prime Minister of the Spanish government. The distribution would have to be according to objective criteria and, if this is the case, Catalonia will obtain an important part of the resources.”

The Basque Nationalists are now starting to demand a new arrangement with Madrid, to have greater access to the funds. On Sunday, the president of the Basque Nationalist Party Andoni Ortuzar which rules the wealthy Basque Country told *El Correo* that pardons “are not enough.” He wanted the PSOE-Podemos government to talk “clearly about the problem that the Spanish state has with its territorial model” and called for a new Basque statute which establishes the main competences it has vis a vis Madrid.

Workers and youth must be warned that these pardons will not lessen the fascist anti-Catalan campaign.

In its contemporary form, Catalan separatism arose out of the 2008 economic crisis which blew up the class tensions of the post-Franco regime. After Madrid’s courts made clear that Catalonia’s regional powers would be limited in 2010, Catalan nationalists responded by whipping up Catalan separatism while implementing billions of euros in cuts. These tensions exploded in 2017, when Madrid seized on the pseudo referendum organised by the Catalan nationalists to shift rapidly to the right, implementing a mass crackdown, whipping up Spanish chauvinism and rehabilitating Francoism.

With wall-to-wall media coverage, the direct product of this was fascist Vox, which although representing little less than 15 percent of the vote, is increasingly dictating the national agenda of the PSOE-Podemos government as evidenced in the deployment of the army to illegally expel tens of thousands of migrants and children. The funnelling of billions of euros to the financial aristocracy on the backs

of the workers, while implementing mass attacks and curtailing democratic rights, will only intensify class tensions.

The pardons are already being seized upon by the right-wing Popular Party (PP) and fascist Vox to further their coup plots to bring down the PSOE-Podemos government and instal a right-wing authoritarian police state regime. On Sunday, 13 June, they are organising a demonstration in Madrid against the pardons. The PP has also started collecting signatures among the population.

In this they will be aided by the Supreme Court which has emerged in the past year as a bastion of the rehabilitation of fascism and the chief executioner of the anti-Catalan campaign. Last week it gave its consultative opinion on the pardons describing them as “unacceptable.” The same judicial institution which accepted pardons for condemned coup plotters in the 1981 fascist coup, is now declaring that pardons are not possible because the jailed Catalan nationalists are not “repentant of their crimes.” It also stated that it would be a “self-pardon” because the Catalan nationalists supported the installation of a PSOE-Podemos government in parliament.

The pardon debate confirms the warnings of the WSWS. Fighting the turn by the ruling classes toward dictatorship and fascism requires a break with the PSOE, “Left Populist” Podemos and the pro-austerity, Catalan nationalists, and a turn to the international working class.

Workers fighting to defend their social and democratic rights must appeal to their class brothers and sisters throughout Europe as a whole, in a common struggle for the socialist transformation of society and the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe. This is inseparable from the struggle to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) in Europe and throughout the world.



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