

Spain: Catalan separatist leader declares Scottish vote “an example for us”

By Alejandro López
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Carme Forcadell, president of the Catalan National Assembly (Assemblea Nacional Catalana-ANC), has declared support for a “yes” vote in the Scottish independence referendum being held on September 18, seven weeks before an unofficial vote in Catalonia November 9.

The ANC was founded in March 2012 following the holding of a “National Conference for Our Own State” in April 2011, which selected a permanent council that included writers, academics, historians, lawyers and others drawn from the upper-middle class. In 2012, accompanied by mass publicity by the Catalan media, the ANC organised a mass rally of 1.5 million on September 11, the national day of Catalonia, under the slogan, “Catalonia, new state in Europe.”

Last year, a similar number took part in a 480-kilometre human chain in support of Catalan independence. Yesterday, there was a huge turnout for the ANC’s “V for Victory” demonstration on Barcelona’s two main streets—Avinguda Diagonal and Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes de Barcelona.

In an interview with *Público*, Forcadell stated, “Whatever happens, the Scottish people have already won, they will have exercised their sovereignty and their right to self-determination. If the Yes [vote] wins, it will be beneficial for us because it will put the European Union on alert. But the fact that they are voting is an example for us.”

Wary that a “No” vote in Scotland would affect the referendum in Catalonia, Forcadell said, “Because the people know they are two different processes. We have long worked towards this path. We have civil society and the parliamentary majority. In Scotland the [referendum] process has come only from the government [side]. But the unity and social force in Catalonia does not exist in Scotland.” Forcadell said this before the latest Scottish referendum poll showed the “Yes” vote had reached 51

percent.

Both separatist movements have more in common than Forcadell would like to admit. They are bourgeois movements that represent the interests of big business and the most privileged sections of the middle class, not working people. Their aim is to establish more direct relations with the banks, corporations and speculators by offering to drive up exploitation, smash wages and working conditions, destroy or privatise social services and slash taxes on corporate wealth.

Business for Scotland (BfS), a coalition of mainly small businesses reliant on government contracts and subsidies, is in favour of independence. BfS argues, “Scotland has paid more tax than the UK average for every one of the past 33 years. This means that Scotland’s finances are strong and can support all public services after independence.”

In the same manner, the ANC complains that Catalonia is confronting a deep economic crisis, while it has “to contribute around 8 percent of its annual GDP, well above any solidarity obligations, to sustain an inefficient Spanish state.”

“Only by becoming an independent country can we hope to overcome this kind of fiscal discrimination,” it adds.

An independent Scotland would, according to the BfS, invest “in manufacturing and create new jobs,” “utilise expanding Arctic trade” and “boost exports of food and drink sales globally.”

The ANC says, “Catalonia aspires to be the Netherlands or Denmark of southern Europe, a small country but with strong commercial links to the rest of the world.”

Both claim that independence would drastically reduce poverty in their regions, leading to a fairer society. This is a fraud. Around the world, the ruling class has pursued a social counterrevolution seeking to redistribute wealth from the bottom to the very top. Attacks on democratic

rights, cuts in essential social services like health care and education, have become the norm. Why would an independent Catalonia or Scotland be any different?

The Scottish National Party and *Convergència i Unió* (Convergence and Unity Party) and *Esquerra Republicana de Catalunya* (Catalan Republican Left of Catalonia-ERC) both seek membership in the European Union, which is demanding austerity across the continent, and in NATO, which is presently expanding its military mobilization against Russia.

An independent Scotland or Catalonia would not promote “peace” within these imperialist organisations, but would participate in their militaristic adventures and demand a share of the spoils.

Scottish nationalists complain about Scots being outnumbered ten to one and subject to “Westminster.” But Scotland has been an integral part of one of the most powerful imperialist states since the Act of Union in 1707 and its ruling class has shared in the crimes and brutal exploitation of millions around the world ever since.

The separatists in both Catalonia and Scotland invoke a false historical narrative that casts these regions as oppressed nations. The ANC talks about the Spanish “colonialist mentality” ruling over Catalonia “as one rules untrustworthy or inferior subjects.” It attempts to root Spanish oppression of Catalonia back to September 11, 1714, when the troops of Philip V of Spain defeated the army of the Crown of Aragon (Aragon, Valencia and Catalonia). In fact, that year marked the end of a war between European powers over who had the right to succeed Charles II as King of Spain. The Crown of Aragon was not fighting for an independent Catalonia, but for the Hapsburg claimant to the Spanish throne, Archduke Charles of Austria.

Catalan nationalism has its real origins at the end of the 19th century. Its objective was not a separate state, but an attempt to modernise Spanish capitalism against the domination of the land-owning aristocracy and the state bureaucracy in Madrid. However, threatened with the growing power of the working class, especially in the industrialised region of Catalonia and the Basque Country, the regional bourgeoisie saw its own working class as a bigger threat than Madrid and aligned itself with the latter.

The Catalan ruling elite suppressed the working class repeatedly. In the “Tragic Week” of 1909, in the coup of General Primo de Rivera in 1923, and General Franco’s coup in 1936 that sparked the Spanish Civil War, the bourgeoisie sided with the army against the working class

even when these regimes suppressed Catalan institutions, persecuted separatists and banned the Catalan language. Catalan workers, like their brothers and sisters in Scotland, are not oppressed because of their nationality, but because of their class position within capitalist society.

The recent growth of Catalan and Scottish separatism has nothing progressive about it. Its emergence is due to the betrayals of social democracy, Stalinism, the trade unions and their pseudo-left apologists. Mass discontent has been channelled by separatist forces and their foot-soldiers, the pseudo-left, who have actively promoted narrowness and parochialism under conditions where the unity of the working class is indispensable in the fight against capitalism.

The championing of separatism in the name of self-determination ignores the experiences of the international working class with bourgeois nationalist movements. The tragic experience of Yugoslavia should serve as a lesson to workers throughout the world. There, NATO, ex-Stalinist bureaucrats and communalist movements encouraged a fratricidal war. Today, the working class lives in ethnically divided states, subject to imperialist domination and increasing social misery, which serve, in turn, as a lever to drive down the living standards of workers in the rest of Europe.

The ANC’s leader Forcadell is very conscious that the main difference between Catalonia and Scotland is that Spain will not allow a referendum to be legally held, which explains why SNP leader Alex Salmond has not openly supported the Catalan referendum. Doing so would jeopardize the future entry of an independent Scotland in the EU, which Spain would likely veto. Madrid continues to reject the independence of Kosovo, while most of its imperialist allies have recognised it, because of internal tensions with Basque and Catalan separatists.

Whatever the outcome, the referendum in Scotland will have consequences. The break-up of the oldest capitalist state would strengthen separatist movements in the rest of Europe.

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