

Pseudo-left CUP props up pro-austerity separatist government in Catalonia

By Alejandro López
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Following September's regional elections in Catalonia, the Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) has emerged as the main prop for the pro-austerity and pro-separatist parties of the Together Yes coalition, comprising Democratic Convergence of Catalonia (CDC) and the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC).

The Together for Yes coalition won 62 seats in the elections, 6 seats short of an absolute majority in the 135-seat Assembly. The CUP obtained 10 seats, holding the balance of power to form a stable majority with a Together for Yes regional government.

The CUP is now providing political cover for a new pro-austerity regional government in Catalonia, promoting its campaign for independence from Spain. Since 2010, the region has been ruled by the CDC's leader and current interim regional president Artur Mas in two minority governments supported by the ERC. This government has imposed savage cuts of 20 percent or more in education, health care and other areas.

Last Monday, the Catalan parliament opened its first session, electing Carme Forcadell from Together for Yes with the CUP's votes as the parliament's new speaker.

She declared, "We represent a sovereign parliament which wants to represent a free people. We are transitioning from a regional parliament with limited powers to a national parliament with full capabilities. Long live the Catalan Republic!"

The next day, the CUP and Together for Yes handed over a joint declaration establishing "the start of the process to create the independent Catalan State in the form of a Republic." It proposes to start within a maximum of 30 days passing laws for a constituent process and establishing social security and a Catalan Public office.

The document calls for a "process of democratic, massive, and pacific disconnection from the Spanish state."

This process has nothing democratic in it. Only 47.7 percent of the voters, just 2 million of the region's 5.5 million registered voters, supported pro-separatist parties (CUP and Together for Yes) in the parliamentary elections, after Mas proclaimed they were a plebiscite on independence from Spain. The largest increase in support went to the anti-separatist Citizens Party, which boosted its number of seats from 9 to 25.

The declaration on independence will be voted in an extraordinary plenary session ahead of the first round of elections to choose the regional president on November 9, with Mas hoping for re-election.

Spanish prime minister Mariano Rajoy reacted to the declaration on starting the secessionist process by describing it as "a provocation" by those who "want to break the law when the law is not by their side." Rajoy has warned that his right-wing Popular Party government will "use all judicial and political mechanisms to defend Spanish sovereignty," stressing that even if the motion is finally approved, "it will have no effect."

Throughout, the CUP has provided political cover to the CDC. Initially, after the elections, it claimed that it would only support a Together for Yes government without Mas, trying to somewhat distance the separatist parties from the CDC's corruption scandals and its record of austerity.

CUP number-two Anna Gabriel declared that the Catalan president "has to be a person who can't be identified with cuts, corruption and privatisations". She claimed the CUP "won't instate Mas as president."

Shortly afterwards, however, the CUP junked its

opposition to Mas, after CDC and ERC leaders made it clear that Mas would be their only candidate for regional president. Gabriel said, “No one has talked about burying anyone, we are not calling for the political death of Mas. First we have to talk about the constitutive process towards the Catalan Republic, the social emergency plan and the breakaway strategy...we will discuss who will be the president later.”

The declaration on independence document is part of this “constitutive process” and “breakaway strategy”, whereby the CUP aims at dressing up its support for a pro-austerity government with secessionist garb to seem palatable to the social forces who voted for them.

The CUP’s demands are in line with the social interests of its membership. Largely composed of university-educated middle class professionals, it views the independence of Catalonia—Spain’s wealthiest region, which would no longer have to subsidise the Spanish budget and those of other Spanish regions—as an opportunity to boost their own wealth and influence.

The growth of the CUP lies in the layers that gravitated around the Indignados movement in 2011. It based itself on “municipalism” and “horizontalist” assembly structures and was opposed to participating in national politics. In 2012, it participated in the regional elections and won three MPs.

It was backed by a whole range of pseudo-left anti-Trotskyist parties such as En Lucha, Corriente Roja and Izquierda Anticapitalista, which have been promoting separatism in Catalonia and the Basque Country for decades.

Apart from independence of the Catalan countries (which include Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, Valencia and South-East France), the CUP’s 2012 programme called for nationalisations, increased taxes on the rich, and a larger role for the public sector. This was, however, political window dressing for a pro-capitalist programme, as shown by its orientation to Mas. Its main concern was providing aid to small Catalan companies to allow them to compete against larger businesses, expressing the interests of middle class layers devastated by the economic crisis.

Once elected, the CUP became the staunchest proponent of independence, pressuring Mas and his government to take a more confrontational stance with Madrid. Its aggressive nationalist politics has served as a conscious strategy to block and disorient rising

opposition in the working class to austerity in Catalonia, and across Spain and all of Europe. As one Catalan regional minister said last December, “If this country [Catalonia] had not put forward a discourse based on nationalism, how would it have weathered adjustments [cuts] of over 6,000 million euros?”

The CUP is now attempting to negotiate the approval of an emergency package against poverty and a stop to privatisations with Together for Yes. This policy is cynical, as the CDC is responsible for austerity measures that have enormously aggravated the crisis. These face-saving measures would have little effect on the huge growth in poverty, which now affects 2.2 million Catalans, nearly 30 percent of the regional population.

The main political representatives of the Catalan bourgeoisie in Together for Yes have made clear they have no fundamental differences with the CUP’s programme. Together for Yes leader Raül Romeva has assured reporters that he “agrees with almost everything” on the CUP’s roadmap towards separation, adding that choosing the president “is now secondary.”

Romeva stated that disobeying Spanish laws “can be done,” pointing to the fact that the interim Catalan government has already started disobeying Madrid, such as on the budget deficit target.

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