

Hundreds of thousands protest Madrid's repression in Catalonia

By Alejandro López
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After Sunday's brutal crackdown on the Catalan independence referendum by Spanish police and paramilitary civil guards left over 900 people injured, hundreds of thousands demonstrated in cities across Catalonia amidst a "national work stoppage." The protest was called by Catalan separatist parties, trade unions and business groups, with the backing of the Catalan regional government.

Youth, shopkeepers, and workers in various industries stayed away from work or marched, including in mass rallies of tens of thousands of people in Barcelona. It made clear yet again that the police's failure to shut down the referendum last Sunday, amid a mass mobilization of the Catalan population, reflected broad popular opposition to authoritarian forms of rule.

Tens of thousands protested in Barcelona throughout the day in front of the headquarters in the region of the ruling Popular Party, the National Police and the civil guards with chants of "The streets will always be ours." Outside Barcelona, thousands filled the main squares of towns and cities throughout Catalonia.

Pickets blocked 57 roads, and many small businesses closed. Almost all schools were closed, as students stayed away. Seventy-five percent of public health workers did not go to work, according to the Catalan Health Ministry. Dockworkers closed down the ports of Barcelona and Tarragona. The agricultural sector was inactive during the day, and the rice farmers of the Ebro Delta interrupted the harvest.

Catalonia's main cultural institutions—the National Theater of Catalonia, the National Art Museum of Catalonia, or the Ateneu Barcelonès—were closed. Barcelona's main monuments, including the Sagrada Família, La Pedrera and the Museum of F.C. Barcelona, also closed.

Workers at Mercabarna, Barcelona's main food-trading estate overseeing wholesale markets supplying over 10 million people, also went on strike. At the Nissan car factory, 70 percent of the autoworkers went on strike, forcing the factory to shut down.

Nonetheless, the organizers of the protest did not want a full work stoppage in Catalonia, let alone across all of Spain. The regional government kept open minimum service in the Barcelona metro for a part of the day. Seat, the car manufacturer and the largest employer in Catalonia, operated normally, as did the petrochemical companies; no major disruptions affected Barcelona's airport.

These protests have shown the deep-rooted opposition in broad layers of the population against mass repression and authoritarianism. However, the most urgent warnings must be made: these forms of protest do nothing to halt the next waves of repression being prepared by the entire Spanish ruling class. This requires the mobilization of the working class throughout all of Spain and across Europe in struggle against the danger of police-state rule.

As the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) explained in its statement on the Catalan referendum, "the only viable policy against the danger of war and dictatorship is to fight to unify the working class in Spain and Europe in a struggle against capitalism and for the socialist reorganization of society. This can be carried out only in revolutionary struggle against all of Spain's bourgeois factions."

The main danger facing workers and youth in Catalonia is that yesterday's protest was organized by forces who defend the existing social order. They are both incapable of and hostile to mobilizing the working class in a political struggle against the Spanish

bourgeoisie, of which they are in fact a part.

The entire Spanish political establishment has closed ranks behind the savage actions of the police on Sunday, while 16,000 civil guards and police are still in Catalonia. Interior Minister Juan Ignacio Zoido has denounced mounting protests outside hotels in Catalonia lodging the Spanish police as “intolerable harassment.”

The Union of Civil Guard Officers, an association of the paramilitary force, posted a statement claiming that they have been “abandoned to their fate, betrayed by disloyal Mossos d’Esquadra [Catalan regional police], incited by treacherous politicians.”

It calls on the leaders of the PP, the PSOE and of the Citizens to “act, to let us loose.” It concludes stating in a fascistic rant: “The Civil Guard dies, but they never give up. The Civil Guard is to serve with honor to its State, with loyalty, with abnegation, with firmness, with prudence, being calm before the danger ... Civil guards do not pour gasoline into the fire, like some politicians who are craving for the state’s fracture, anarchy, revolution, nonsense.”

The endorsement of police violence is accompanied by intense discussions of the implementation of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which would pave the way for the Spanish army and police to take over the Catalan regional government and put the region under their rule.

The minority PP government is waiting for the backing of the Socialist Party. Although the PP could apply Article 155 alone, PP parliamentary spokesperson Rafael Hernando considered that “such a measure must have the greatest possible support.”

Yesterday, the PSOE adopted a position of studied equivocation as to whether it will endorse a military-police onslaught against Catalonia. In a press conference after a PSOE Executive meeting, Secretary for Federal Policy Patxi López was repeatedly asked about the party’s position on Article 155. He said, “First we will see if the [Catalan] Parliament makes a unilateral declaration of independence, then we will see what are the state’s mechanisms to avoid and stop such madness.”

Citizens, which first emerged as a Catalan anti-secessionist party before jumping into national politics, is demanding Rajoy invoke Article 155 to stop a unilateral declaration on independence, over which

the secessionists are still divided. Citizens’ leader Albert Rivera said, “If anybody has a proposal, let them say so now, because there’s 72 hours left before [the Catalan government] declares independence, and that’s something that cannot be stopped with a registered fax from the Constitutional Court.”

Sections of Spain’s right-wing press is baying for blood, arguing for invoking Article 155 to proceed with mass repression, arrests, and layoffs of workers deemed disloyal to the state. In an opinion piece in conservative daily *ABC*, Manuel Marín argued against any negotiations with the Catalan nationalists, advocating instead the use of Article 155.

He wrote that invoking this clause “would lead to violence in the streets ... And millions of supporters and detractors throughout Spain should prepare themselves mentally to attend arrests, suspensions, disqualifications from public office and an aggressive street insurrection that shall be stifled. Hatred would cease to be controllable even by the instigators of the [secessionist] farce.”

There is deep opposition in the working class in Spain and across Europe to these wild, fascistic threats. However, it must be bluntly stated: this opposition can only be mobilized in an effective struggle against the threat of a new crackdown by breaking with the Catalan nationalists and their business and trade union allies, and turning to an international and revolutionary struggle of the working class against capitalism.

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