

Deadline looms for Catalonia to confirm or deny independence declaration

By Alejandro López
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The Popular Party (PP) government, backed by the Citizens party and the Socialist Party (PSOE), is preparing to seize control of Catalonia if regional premier Carles Puigdemont confirms today that he has declared independence from Spain.

Last Tuesday, Puigdemont told the Catalan parliament that he had “accepted” the mandate for independence based on the results of the October 1 referendum, but then suspended it for “a few weeks” to pursue negotiations with the Spanish government. Puigdemont’s Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCAT), the Republican Left of Catalonia (ERC), and the pseudo-left Popular Unity Candidacy (CUP) then signed a document declaring Catalonia’s independence from Spain.

On Sunday, Puigdemont did not disclose what he is planning to do, stating that “we want to reiterate our commitment to democracy and peace as the inspirers of the decision we have to make.”

The secessionists have spent the past week seeking to strike a deal with Madrid, but no deal is on offer. Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy has stuck by his provocative ultimatum, demanding Puigdemont clarify by today at 10:00 a.m. whether he declared independence.

If he says yes, or declines to respond, Rajoy promises to invoke Article 155 of the Spanish constitution. This allows Madrid to suspend the authority of the Catalan regional government and seize control of the region’s finances, administration and police forces.

Such an unpopular measure would necessarily involve the army and the potential invocation of Article 116 to impose a state of emergency. The army has already drawn up an attack plan, code-named Cota de Malla (Chain Mail), in which the army will back police and civil guards in occupying Catalonia.

Sections of the PP are already indicating the reactionary implications of Article 155. Catalan PP leader Xavier García Albiol said that if 155 is invoked “it will be the time to rethink certain things,” such as the educational system in Catalonia and the role of the regional police, the Mossos d’Esquadra. Albiol said, “The majority of the Catalan public school, instead of dedicating themselves to teaching, educate children to hate Spain” and accused regional police of having become “an instrument in favor of the independence.”

His remarks, which are associated with the far-right, are a clear indication that the government is preparing to roll back substantial concessions to the regional bourgeoisie given to them after the end of the Franco regime to ensure their loyalty to the state.

To underscore the type of repression being planned, the leaders of the main pro-secessionist organisations, Jordi Sànchez of the Catalan National Assembly (ANC) and Jordi Cuixart of Òmnium Cultural, along with Josep Lluís Trapero, the Catalan police chief, are in court today charged with sedition. There is already talk of them being placed in preventative custody.

While the immediate target of 155 is Catalonia, the broader target is the working class of Spain and Europe. Madrid is now openly discussing which technocrat would rule a new non-elected administration in Catalonia under Article 155, another indication of how class tensions have reached extreme levels incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

El Español provided some names being discussed under the provocative title, “Who will be the Pich and Pon of 155? Six candidates for ‘governor’ of Catalonia.” Juan Pich y Pon was named Governor General of Catalonia after the Catalan self-government was crushed in October 1934.

The names listed are Enric Millo, the current delegate

of the Spanish government in Catalonia, who led the repression during the independence referendum on October 1 that left over 800 injured; Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, the PP's current deputy prime minister of Spain; Dolors Montserrat, the current Minister of Health; Jesús María Barrientos; the current president of the High Court of Justice of Catalonia; Socialist Party member and former Spanish Minister of Work, Celestino Corbacho and Duran i Lleida, a former leader of the Democratic Union of Catalonia, a nationalist party opposed to separatism.

The PP's preparations for a military-police crackdown enjoy the support of the major European powers and the United States, which fear the break-up of a member of the European Union and the NATO alliance. Last Friday, the EU made its endorsement of Rajoy clear once again, with European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker declaring, "If we allow Catalonia—and it is not our business—to separate, others will do the same... I do not want that. I wouldn't like a European Union in 15 years that consists of some 98 states."

Faced with the prospect of a military crackdown, the Catalan bourgeoisie and its middle-class allies of the CUP are in crisis. Puigdemont cannot simply back down. If he does, the CUP has threatened that it would withdraw its parliamentary support, the key to Puigdemont's minority government.

In a letter delivered to Puigdemont on Friday, the CUP demands an immediate "proclamation of the republic", adding, "If [the central government] mean to keep applying the provisions of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, let them do so with the republic already proclaimed."

The CUP withdrawing support would imply snap elections, in which the secessionist parties might lose a majority in parliament against the forces backed by Madrid.

Avoiding answering the CUP, regional vice premier and leader of the ERC, Oriol Junqueras, said, "What we are doing is the republic, and the best way to do it is through dialogue, dialogue to make the republic, and to do it effectively we need to preserve unity."

Hostile to any mobilization of broader opposition to Madrid's crackdown in the Spanish working class, the separatist forces are instead busying themselves preparing a set of measures in an independent

Catalonia which would work as tax incentives for companies.

On Sunday, the Catalan News Agency reported that the regional government sees independence as "an opportunity in the mid-term to improve the market conditions which companies have faced until now."

It added that a Catalan state should have a more advantageous fiscal framework for the economy so as to create "incentives to new investments, job creation".

Such remarks confirm the correctness of the *World Socialist Web Site*'s statement on the independence referendum, which explained, "The separatist parties aim to create a new mini-state through which they can claw back taxes presently paid to the central government, while establishing direct relations with global banks, transnational corporations and the European Union. They hope to transform Catalonia into a low-tax free trade area based on stepped-up exploitation of the working class."

Such pro-capitalist politics only serves to divide the working class against itself, under conditions where the critical task is the political unification and mobilization of the Spanish and European working class against the repression planned by Madrid and in a struggle for socialism.

The pseudo-left Podemos has until yesterday continued its task of demobilizing all opposition to the PP and disarming the Spanish working class in the face of a massive state build-up by continuing its empty appeals to Rajoy.

Podemos spokesperson to the Senate, Ramón Espinar, said on Saturday that Rajoy should dialogue with Puigdemont "before applying any exceptional measures," adding that "Rajoy has to think about it" and that he is still "on time" to do so: "Before applying any exceptional measure on Catalonia, what he has to do is to sit with Puigdemont: I do not know what better things Rajoy and Puigdemont have to do than sit down and talk".

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