

Spanish government vows to impose military-backed regime in Catalonia

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The Spanish government's declaration yesterday that it plans to invoke Article 155 of the Spanish constitution tomorrow, suspending Catalan regional autonomy, is a political watershed and an urgent warning to workers not only in Spain, but across Europe and internationally.

In a major Western European country, and with the support of the European Union (EU) and Washington, the ruling class is announcing plans for a turn to authoritarian rule. In invoking Article 155, Madrid would be suspending an elected Catalan government for the first time since 1978 and the end of the fascist Spanish regime created by Francisco Franco during the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War. It would then forcibly impose another regional administration, backed by deployments of Spanish police and armored infantry units.

Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy gave a deadline of yesterday at 10 a.m. for the Catalan regional premier, Carles Puigdemont, to state whether Catalonia had declared independence after the "yes" vote in the October 1 Catalan referendum.

Without explicitly replying "no," which could lead his own government to collapse, Puigdemont made clear he had not declared independence in his October 10 speech to the Catalan parliament. He appealed for talks with Madrid: "I proposed to suspend the effects of the popular vote. I did this to create favorable conditions for dialogue." However, he warned, "If the Spanish government persists in blocking dialogue and using repression, the Catalan parliament may, if it is opportune, vote the formal declaration of independence that it did not vote on October 10."

Rajoy thrust this reply aside, issuing a brief communiqué declaring that Puigdemont had failed to give the clear reply demanded of him. "In consequence," the communiqué stated, "the Spanish

government will continue with filings under Article 155 of the Constitution to restore legality in the Catalan region." It said Spain's council of ministers would meet Saturday to work out measures to be approved by the Spanish Senate, which must vote to authorize the invocation of Article 155.

The turn towards military-police rule in Spain is an indictment not only of the Spanish ruling elite, but of the entire European Union (EU). Arriving last night for the two-day EU summit in Brussels, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron explicitly backed Madrid's attacks on democratic rights. "We support the Spanish government's position," declared Merkel, while Macron promised that the EU summit would issue "a message of unity around Spain."

After a savage police assault on peaceful voters on October 1 sent over 800 people to the hospital, Madrid shut down Catalan nationalist web sites, discussed banning Catalan nationalist parties and arrested two Catalan nationalist politicians, Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart—provoking protests by hundreds of thousands in Barcelona.

Madrid is also discussing implementing Article 116 of the Constitution, which would set up a state of emergency across Spain suspending constitutional rights to trial, to strike, to privacy and to freedom of movement, thought and expression.

Backed by Berlin and Paris, the ruling Partido Popular (PP) is working with the support of the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and the Citizens Party to implement the turn to dictatorship, while flaunting its own roots in Franco's regime. Having called protests for Spanish national unity attended by Franco's Falange organization, a spokesman for the Rajoy government issued a death threat to Puigdemont—boasting that he could "end up" like 1930s-era Catalan premier Lluís

Companys, who was shot by the Franco regime in 1940.

Madrid and the EU are seizing on the Catalan crisis to implement police-state measures that are being universally prepared against the population. Across Europe and America, governments of all stripes are demanding Internet censorship, while carrying out mass electronic spying and deploying the army or militarized police units for domestic repression.

The events in Spain are the clearest indication that such methods can and will be turned against mass political opposition—like the peaceful mobilization of broad sections of the Catalan population to vote in the October 1 referendum.

The events in Spain are rooted in the extreme crisis of the capitalist system, internationally and in Europe. They are the outcome of a quarter century of escalating imperialist war, economic crisis and capitalist austerity. As Trump threatens to obliterate North Korea, endless US-led wars are escalating into standoffs with Russia and China, threatening world war and driving the dominant sections of the European bourgeoisie to desperately develop the EU as an independent military bloc with an “EU army.”

The main target of the military buildup is the working class. Since the 2008 Wall Street crash, EU austerity, rising social inequality and mass unemployment of tens of millions across Europe have led to explosive levels of social anger. The EU’s “Generation What” poll found this year that over half of European youth would join a “large-scale uprising”—over 60 percent in Greece, Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, Britain, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania.

Leading European politicians are making clear that, in this context, they see the Catalan referendum as an intolerable threat to European imperialism’s military-political standing. After EU Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker warned that Catalan secession could lead to a “domino effect” and “an EU that in 15 years consisted of 98 states,” German Green politician Joschka Fischer returned to the issue in a column titled “Europe’s Attackers from Within.”

Fischer stressed that he thought Catalan secessionism would prevent European imperialism from challenging global rivals in the US and Asia that equal or surpass the EU as a whole in size. He wrote, “It would be historically absurd for the EU’s member states to enter

a phase of secession and disintegration in the twenty-first century. The sheer size of other global players—not least China, India, and the United States—has only made strong intercommunity relations and deeper European integration even more necessary.”

Workers must be warned: the EU will not intervene to help persuade the PP government to uphold democratic rights—as the Podemos party is suggesting in an attempt to lull the working class to sleep. Based on its imperialist calculations, the EU is lining up behind Rajoy’s drive to re-legitimize the heritage of Francoism and turn to dictatorship.

The turn is to the working class in both Catalonia and the rest of Spain, across Europe and internationally, where there is deep, historically rooted opposition to authoritarian rule, war and austerity. However, this objective opposition must be mobilized in a conscious, united political struggle for socialism, the coming to power of the working class in countries across Europe and the building of the United Socialist States of Europe.

The critical question is the independent political mobilization of the working class. Workers must be warned that the pro-independence faction of the Catalan capitalist class around Puigdemont is seeking a deal with the EU and is hostile to the workers. A socialist movement must be built independently of all sections of the Spanish and Catalan bourgeoisie.

The working class, however, must categorically oppose the bloody crackdown on Catalonia that Madrid is preparing. The unity of the European working class mobilized on a socialist and internationalist perspective can be built only in struggle against Rajoy’s attempt to defend Spain’s territorial integrity through force of arms.

The watchword of class-conscious workers in Europe will be: No to dictatorship and military rule in Spain! Spanish troops out of Catalonia! For the United Socialist States of Europe!

Alex Lantier

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