

EU backs Madrid's imposition of authoritarian regime in Catalonia

By Francis Dubois
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The European Union is supporting Madrid's imposition of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution to impose a puppet government in Catalonia. Giving Madrid a blank check to turn back the clock to the authoritarian policies of the fascist regime led by Francisco Franco, which fell in 1978 amid mass struggles of the Spanish working class, the EU is shattering whatever pretenses remain that it is a force for democracy.

As Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy prepares to dissolve the Catalan parliament, seize control of the regional state apparatus, beginning with the security services and the ministries, and purge the public service, the EU is fully backing him. Rajoy's Popular Party (PP) government, supported by Spain's other bourgeois parties, has readied tens of thousands of *Guardia Civil* and soldiers to carry through its attack on Catalonia.

The workers of both Catalonia and the rest of Spain have been led into this perilous situation as a result of the treacherous right-wing policies of the supposed "left" of the bourgeois political establishment, the social democrats and Podemos, and the reactionary pro-capitalist and pro-European Union perspective of the Catalan nationalist parties. All of these parties have supported the brutal austerity policies imposed on workers across Spain since the 2008 financial crisis at the behest of the EU and the European and international banks.

Despite the sharp conflict between the Spanish bourgeoisie and its Catalan nationalist counterpart, they are united in their determination to make the working class pay for the crisis of Spanish and European capitalism.

Madrid has given the powers of the impeached premier of Catalonia, Carles Puigdemont, to Spanish Vice-Prime Minister Soraya Saenz de Santamaría, who is charged with running the province and overseeing snap elections unilaterally set by Madrid for December 21. This is a sign that Madrid is moving toward a return to dictatorship. Saenz de Santamaría comes from a family intimately connected to the repressive apparatus of the Francoite regime.

Her grandfather, General José Antonio Saenz de

Santamaría, played a leading role in the Francoite security forces after the Civil War, up until 1996, two decades after Franco's death.

The EU is now backing the return to a similarly undemocratically installed regime. "I have one person I talk to in Spain, that is Prime Minister Rajoy... He wants to respect [constitutional rules] and he has my full support," French President Emmanuel Macron said on Sunday while on a voyage to Guyana. Macron's foreign minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, said he did not recognize Catalan independence and wanted a "strong and united" Spain.

Germany "refuses to recognize the independence of Catalonia," declared German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who added that she fully supported Madrid. Her spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said that Berlin supports the "clear" position of Rajoy, "who aims to restore order and calm."

Even as it temporarily grants asylum to the impeached Catalan Premier Carles Puigdemont, the Belgian government is also backing Madrid. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel indirectly exhorted the Catalan population to accept a military-backed regime, saying, "The political crisis can be resolved only through dialog. We are calling for a pacific solution that respects the national and international order."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg wrote on Twitter: "The Catalan issue must be resolved within the constitutional order. Spain is a faithful ally that strongly contributes to our security."

On Friday, EU Commissioner Carlos Moedas had said: "What is happening now is very hard for everyone involved, but we as the European Union must defend Spain's constitutional order."

The encouragement by European governments of the imposition of some form of police-military dictatorship in Catalonia—the prelude to the imposition of such a regime more broadly across Spain and Europe—is a warning to the working class. EU governments are reacting to the Catalan crisis as an opportunity to impose dictatorial regimes in countries across Europe.

This is the outcome of a quarter-century of mounting austerity and militarism in Europe since the Stalinist bureaucracy's dissolution of the Soviet Union. As class tensions rise as a result of explosive levels of social inequality, mass unemployment and social attacks that are the greatest since the Great Depression of the 1930s, the ruling class is repudiating even the outer forms of democratic rule. It is moving back toward the bloody and authoritarian capitalist regimes of the middle of the 20th century in Europe.

An article in the daily *L'Alsace* titled "The Catalan powder keg" stated: "The government of Mariano Rajoy faces the difficulty of taking the reins in Catalonia without providing a pretext for opposition. The slightest excess, from one side or the other, could be the spark that sets off a situation ready to explode."

Another regional French daily, *Le Bien public*, also called Catalonia "a powder keg" and concluded, "In such a very tense climate, violent excesses can never be excluded."

It added, "Catalan nationalist militants, used to pacific resistance, will not let police arrest their leaders facing sedition charges and, in theory, up to 30 years in prison. Madrid can maintain its juridical firmness without committing the error of sending in the troops. But what no one can predict are the reactions of non-Catalan populations who make up entire suburbs of Barcelona and can be aggressive. 'In meetings, in cafés, we avoid talking about it and that's for the best. It's a powder keg,' said one social-democratic official from Barcelona."

As the EU countries throw off the democratic mask, they are leaving the population no other future than a series of authoritarian police states, monitored by increasingly powerful police and surveillance forces capable of spying on all aspects of citizens' lives.

In France, Macron is making permanent the state of emergency via the new antiterror law that creates a *de facto* police state. Another measure taken in parallel with this law is the creation of a planning staff bringing together the heads of the intelligence agencies and various security forces, which could lead to a police-military regime against social opposition.

Macron, who was marketed during this year's presidential election as the democratic alternative to neofascist candidate Marine Le Pen, clearly signaled—by receiving Egyptian military dictator General Abdel Fattah al-Sisi a few days ago at the Elysée presidential palace—that he does not oppose dictatorship.

The only way forward is the independent political mobilization of the European working class in struggle against the reactionary measures of the Rajoy government and of the other EU states, demanding the withdrawal of

Spanish troops from Catalonia and an end to the crackdown.

However, workers can carry out such a perspective only in opposition to the Catalan nationalists, whose perspective is to continue imposing austerity while building an independent Catalan capitalist state. This means as well a struggle against the pseudo-left parties, which either promote the Catalan bourgeois nationalists or defend the Spanish capitalist state, in both cases seeking to subordinate the working class to the European ruling classes. The way forward is the struggle to unite European workers under the banner of the United Socialist States of Europe.

The Catalan crisis has exposed the bankrupt and reactionary character of organizations such as Spain's Podemos party and Unsubmissive France (LFI) of Jean-Luc Mélenchon, which are hostile to all appeals to mobilize the workers in struggle against state repression. Podemos has consistently used "appeals for dialog" to pose as a party capable of resolving the crisis while strangling social opposition. It has finally aligned itself with the Rajoy government by backing its call for December 21 elections in Catalonia, and thus the broader repression organized by Madrid.

The French ally of Podemos, LFI leader Mélenchon, after having appealed to Macron to intervene with Rajoy, has now declared his support for Rajoy's fraudulent elections. "I don't want anyone to simply declare independence like that nor to repress independence. People must vote," he said this weekend.

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