

The show trial of the Catalan nationalists and the far-right danger in Spain

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Yesterday, after the show trial of Catalan nationalists began in Madrid, Catalan nationalist legislators declined to support the minority Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) government's budget. PSOE Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's budget failed by 191-158. After meeting with his council of ministers on Thursday, he is expected to call elections this spring.

Polls show that if elections were held today, the Popular Party (PP, 23.1 percent), Citizens (Cs, 19.2 percent) and the new anti-Catalan, pro-fascist PP split-off VOX (8.9 percent) together would win a 51 percent majority. PP leader Pablo Casado called yesterday for a "common front" of these right-wing parties, after they formed a regional governmental alliance last month in Andalusia.

The response of the Spanish ruling class to growing strikes and protests in Spain and across Europe, against European Union (EU) austerity is to build a fascistic regime. Objectively, this faces powerful working class opposition. However, this historically-rooted opposition to the legacy of Spanish fascist dictator Francisco Franco, who conquered Spain in the 1936-1939 Civil War and whose regime ruled until 1978, finds no expression through the existing parties.

The PSOE and its pseudo-left ally, Podemos, are reactionary and bankrupt. Podemos was the key supporter of the PSOE government, trying until the last moment yesterday to secure a deal with Catalan nationalists to approve the budget. Promoting nationalism and populism and pouring scorn on the working class's struggle for socialism, the Stalinist and Pabloite professors leading Podemos have allowed the ruling class to resuscitate Spanish neo-fascism. The fascistic danger is very real.

Podemos brought the PSOE to power last year not through elections, but back-channel talks to assemble a narrow parliamentary majority of the PSOE, Podemos,

and the Catalan and Basque nationalists. This coalition then put Sanchez in power, ousting PP Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy. Podemos General Secretary Professor Pablo Iglesias explained the nationalist perspective underlying his electoral strategy: "We're proud to be Spanish, and we will use the words that you use to win in politics. Because if you don't win, you can't change things."

In fact, with a "realistic" policy taking over conceptions of the nationalist right, Podemos prepared not victory but defeat. Once in power, the PSOE—the main party of capitalist rule in Spain since 1978—predictably pursued an agenda indistinguishable from that of the PP, alienating workers and strengthening the neo-fascists. It kept the PP's 2018 austerity budget, poured billions into the army and, critically, continued the PP's repression of the Catalan nationalists.

Tuesday, the trial began of twelve Catalan nationalists arrested after the October 1, 2017 Catalan independence referendum, on charges of rebellion and sedition. The Catalan nationalist parties are reactionary pro-austerity parties, tacitly backing NATO wars and the EU. But this trial is an attack on democratic rights, including freedom of thought and of assembly, and a threat to legalize all opposition to the state, that is unprecedented since the fall of Francoism. It must be opposed.

Catalan regional vice-premier Oriol Junqueras, or Catalan cultural association leaders Jordi Sànchez and Jordi Cuixart face 25 years in jail for peaceful political activity: organizing a referendum, or calling demonstrations. They have already been in prison for over a year, on charges of organizing a violent uprising. However, the only violence during the referendum was the PP's police crackdown on peaceful voters, sending over 800 to the hospital.

After the referendum, the PSOE supported Rajoy's government as it incited anti-Catalan protests where Francoite songs were sung, and the head of the Spanish army declared Catalan nationalism the "greatest threat to our democracy." It is now clear that this campaign, echoing Francoite denunciations of "reds and separatists" was an attempt by the entire ruling class, amid mounting social anger after a decade of EU austerity, to shift politics far to the right.

Under the Podemos-backed PSOE regime, prosecutors are making the Orwellian claim that the prisoners are guilty of the violence committed by the state against their supporters. "I don't think responsibility for the violence on referendum day can be attributed to Spain's law enforcement but to those who, knowing the law, mobilized thousands of citizens. They acted as human walls impeding the legitimate police operation," prosecutor Javier Zaragoza said at trial yesterday.

VOX has been allowed to constitute itself as a "public prosecutor" allied to the state, and is demanding prison sentences of over 60 years for the defendants.

At the same time, VOX president Santiago Abascal publicly defended Franco's record in the Civil War. "We are the voice of those whose forefathers fought in Franco's army and who do not want to condemn what their families did," he declared last month. "There are those who do not want street names to change just because of the political fanaticism of those who want Spain to have a one-sided memory."

This is a defense of fascist suppression of the working class via state terror and mass murder. Franco led a coup against the Spanish Republic in 1936. After a bloody three-year Civil War—in which Franco exploited above all the role of Stalinist and social-democratic parties, who suppressed working class uprisings and murdered Trotskyists fighting for revolution in Spain—he cemented his regime with the mass murder of hundreds of thousands of left-wing workers and youth.

Nonetheless, the EU is expressing full confidence in the show trial of the Catalan nationalists. "We fully trust the legal system in Spain," European Commission Vice President Jyrki Katainen said yesterday, adding that "this is not a political question. We do not make political statements on the developments."

The sharpest warnings are in order: after three decades of imperialist war since the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union in 1991, and a decade of deep EU austerity since the 2008 crash, European capitalism is rotting on its feet.

In every country, unpopular governments are inciting neo-fascist movements against the threat of domestic opposition. While the German Grand Coalition government backs right-wing extremist professors seeking to whitewash Hitlerism to defend their remilitarization policy, French President Emmanuel Macron is hailing fascist dictator Philippe Pétain and violently repressing "yellow vests." Spain, which pundits sometimes claimed to be immune to neo-fascism due to workers' hatred of Francoism, has been added to that list.

An upsurge in the international class struggle is developing. "Yellow vest" protests in France, mass one-day strikes in Belgium and Germany, and strikes by taxi drivers, port, retail, airport and metro workers, in recent months in Spain are all signs of the powerful eruption of the class struggle that is being prepared. However, an outpouring of militancy and social anger will encounter determined opposition in the ruling elite, and the working class internationally faces a political struggle.

The basis for a struggle to defend democratic rights is socialist internationalism and a turn to the working class, through a determined political break with the Stalinist and Pabloite politics of Podemos and similar pseudo-left parties across Europe. This signifies the struggle to build sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) to offer revolutionary leadership to the working class in Spain and in countries across Europe, opposing to capitalism and the EU the fight for the United Socialist States of Europe.

Alex Lantier

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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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