

<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5156>



Catalonia

Catalonia's right to decide

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV512 - September 2017 -

Publication date: Wednesday 27 September 2017

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

We are in the home stretch of a test of strength over the Catalan parliament's convening of a 1 October independence referendum. No one knows what will happen when that day arrives, but a clash of legitimacies and legalities is inevitable.

On one side, we find a bloc of forces committed to carrying through the referendum, with a majority voting "yes" for a Catalan Republic. The will to do so was reaffirmed powerfully on 11 September – Catalonia's traditional nationalist holiday – as well as by Catalunya En Comú¹ joining in the 1-O [as the referendum date is commonly called] movement, even if this is under the ambiguous formula of "mobilization." [1]

In addition to some new polls – such as one by eldiario.es on September 18 that reported 60 percent of respondents intended to participate in the referendum – we can add a litany of recent events confirming support for this legitimate aspiration, including: the multitudinous demonstration in Bilbao on 16 September after the last-minute prohibition of a conference organized by Ana Gabriel [a CUP leader] in Vitoria-Gasteiz [capital of the Basque autonomous region]; the massive solidarity rally in Madrid on September 17 spurred on by free publicity when a municipal judge tried to ban it; the debate and demonstration on September 16 and 17 in Xixón in the autonomous region of Asturias; and new protests and solidarity initiatives that are taking place all across the Spanish state – these latter might still represent a minority opinion, but one that is increasing.

This is a bloc that, as we are seeing, is expanding day by day owing to the growing perception that not only is the 1-O referendum in question, but also the defense of civil liberties and democracy in all parts of the state in the face of an increasingly authoritarian turn by the government.

On the other side, we find a conglomeration of economic powers and the Spanish regime, supported by its judicial, media and intellectual brigades. They are closing ranks behind conservative People's Party President Mariano Rajoy's declaration that "whatever is not legal is not democratic" with the firm intention of deploying everything in the legislative, penal, and political arsenal to impede the referendum.

It is, without doubt, a powerful bloc, but it is led by the most corrupt party – servile before the banks and European Union's financial powers, for instance, with the scandalous "loss" of 40 million euros during the "banking rescue" – one that faces increasing risks of losing the battle of public opinion in the coming weeks even beyond the question of Catalonia.

This deployment of force is being implemented through police searches of print and media outlets, the confiscation of tens of thousands of posters, the prohibition of rallies, the decision of a State Attorney General to issue restraining orders against more than 700 Catalan mayors who have declared themselves willing to facilitate the 1-O referendum and, above all, by the introduction of direct "control" of the Catalan Government's finances by Spanish State Minister Cristobal Montoro.

A de facto state of emergency has thus been established, based on a practical breach of Catalonia's autonomous freedoms, rights and powers. These actions stand without precedent in the constitutional order established in 1978 after the death of fascist dictator Francisco Franco.

For those of us who are a little older, it's not surprising, as these days remind us of the state's practices during our struggle against the Franco dictatorship. The threats bandied about by Rajoy in Barcelona ("We will be forced to do

what we do not wish to do") only definitively confirm once more the shameful blessing offered by Pedro Sánchez " leader of the neoliberal Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) " for Rajoy's actions.

The central state will not renounce new steps towards the application of Article 155 that allows it to suspend home rule in any of Spain's seventeen autonomous regions if they are deemed to have "gravely attacked the general interest of Spain." In fact, Rajoy is already doing so and will do more still in order to prevent a new and more powerful November 9, 2014, when 80 percent voted in favor of Catalan independence in a non-binding referendum, although on only roughly 40 percent turnout.

One hundred years later, is there a "third way"?

We have arrived at the crossroads, and the historical scope of this clash means that, however October 1 unfolds, the next day will initiate a new phase of regime and state crisis that is already going far beyond one whose effects are limited to an autonomous "model" whose exhaustion has long been evident.

In this context, the recent proposal by Unidos Podemos [as the left-wing Podemos party and the Communist Party-led United Left's merger is known], En Comú Podem [one of the left-wing components of the newly-united Catalunya en Comú] and En Marea [En Masse " a left-wing front in the Galicia region] for an Extraordinary Assembly " to be composed of autonomous region, state and European members of parliament and city councils representing municipalities of more than 50,000 people " that would call on Rajoy to dialogue with the Catalan government to seek "democratic political solutions," such as a negotiated referendum, appears to be an initiative whose time has passed.

In any case, hopefully, it can be organized before 1 October so it might act as a brake on Rajoy and his team before the clash arrives. At any rate, it seems that the PSOE won't participate in this work, and Rajoy's PP and the populist-right Citizens party are unlikely to pay any attention to what might come of such an assembly.

This initiative, as some have already remarked in the press, harkens back to the "constituent rebellion" of Parliamentary Assemblies, convened in the Governor's Palace of the Parque de la Ciudadela in Barcelona on 19 July 1917, when Spain was still a monarchy.

Before being detained, 55 deputies and 13 senators (of whom 46 were Catalan) demanded a "thoroughgoing renovation of Spain's public life" and proposed elections to constitutional assemblies for a government that would no longer be at the service of a rigged bipartisan system, one that would "personify and represent the sovereign will of the country."

However, after its failure, Francesc Cambó " leader of a conservative and autonomist Catalan nationalism " came to an accommodation with the crown as well as with Franco after he took power starting in 1936.

However, the 100 years that have since passed have not been in vain. Now that the autonomist experience has run its course and the federal state path is blocked, a majority movement for independence and sovereignty is demanding its right to decide whether or not to separate from the Spanish state in the face of a bipartisan system that has entered into crisis.

This new movement cannot count on a new Cambó figure emerging to guarantee bipartisan governability, such was

at least partially the case with Jordi Pujol who led the Democratic Convergence for Catalonia [DCD, representing the pro-autonomy section of Catalan capital and the middle classes] for over 30 years, serving as president of the Catalan government from 1980 to 2003.

The DCD changed its name to the Catalan European Democratic Party (PDeCat) last summer in an attempt to distance itself from corruption charges, but it is now in decline, and even it favors independence, no longer being satisfied with a "fiscal pact" and more promises from the central Spanish state. Besides, it's confronted with a regime that isn't even willing to reform the Constitution and has lost all legitimacy in Catalonia precisely because of the Constitutional Court's ruling that prohibits the Catalan government from conducting the referendum.

In this framework of growing polarization, there appears to be no space for a "third way" without, at least for the moment, seeing what truth is revealed on 1 October.

Therefore, we are left with two related antagonisms: one is a fundamentalist constitutionalism led, for instance, by Spanish magistrate José Yusty Basterrechea "who boasts a long Francoist history" whose aim is to ban rallies like the "right to decide" action organized in Madrid. Likewise, José Maza, the Spanish Attorney General "even as he was censured by parliament for stalling anti-corruption investigations" will no doubt take radical measures in the name of "Spanish unity."

Meanwhile, there are the right-to-decide forces, including those who oppose the referendum, but concede its hegemonic status in Catalonia. Remember that the same Constitutional Court that has suspended the Catalan parliament's referendum act wrote in its decision of 25 March 2014, that the that formula "expressed a political aspiration that can be accommodated within a Constitutional framework" and that it could serve to avoid problems "arising from the desire of one part of the state to change its juridical status."

What has happened since then to make the PP and the PSOE turn away from this open door to arrive at an agreement with the majority of the Catalan parliament? Nothing. Worse still is that they are not even trying to find a legal path to an agreement about how to hold such a referendum.

Thus, facing a door slammed shut, the 1-O referendum has all the legitimacy it needs in the eyes of international legal opinion based on similar cases. International recognition of the referendum's results will depend on turnout, making widespread participation the central goal of the coming weeks in the face of the obstacles put in place by the Spanish state.

At the end of the day, the right to decide, as we heard on Sunday, 17 September in Madrid from the mouths of the spokespeople of the forces behind the referendum, isn't only about proclaiming a Republic.

Many pro-independence activists are also strongly committed to extending this right to other questions that affect their lives and their futures. It's a right that can express the will to convert themselves into a sovereign people, not only vis-à-vis the Spanish state, but also in opposition to the European Union, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and the financial oligarchy.

Looking beyond reluctance towards aspects of the "road map" developed by the majority of the Catalan parliament, or insufficient guarantees this referendum can overcome the government's roadblocks, can anyone doubt that a Rajoy victory, a victory of the judicial, media and intellectual tripartite, a victory of the legislative, police and financial power bloc that supports the Spanish state can mean anything other than an authoritarian and ultra-centralist regression that would be directed against all peoples?

Catalonia's right to decide

Such a victory would facilitate the definitive dismantling of our liberties and social rights. On the contrary, a step forward in social and institutional disobedience to the Spanish state from Catalonia might open the door to a challenge to not only Rajoy's government but also to the constitutional structure of the regime itself.

For all these reasons, this is not time to turn aside or to say that, as some sections of the Spanish left argue, "this conflict doesn't affect us." After all, a defeat for those who want to exercise their right to vote on 1-O will be a defeat for us as well.

Much better to raise our voices, as they did in Bilbao and Madrid last Sunday, and sing along with Lluís Llach's famous L'estaca: "If you pull hard here, and I pull hard there, the stake [we're all tied to] falls, falls, falls, and we can liberate ourselves."

17 September 2017

First published in Spanish at [Viento Sur](#). English translation by Todd Chretien for [socialistworker.org](#).

[1] See Josep Maria Antentas [The dilemma of Catalunya en Comú](#).