



Freedom for Carles Puigdemont. No Extradition to the Spanish State

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Carles Puigdemont, the democratically elected president of Catalonia was arrested in Germany on 25 March. Immediately the news came through, tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Barcelona and his home town of Girona. The police used violence on a massive scale against them, including shots fired into the air as a "deterrent".

Puigdemont has been on the run since the beginning of November. His crime? On 27 October 2017 he had proclaimed the independence of his country. Despite immediately suspending the declaration's implementation, hoping to negotiate with the government in Madrid, and appealing for mediation by the European Union, the Spanish government of Mariano Rajoy and Spain's High Court began seeking his imprisonment for sedition, rebellion and high treason - conviction for which carries a sentence of 30 years in prison.

The justification for this is that the Spanish Constitution does not allow any of the state's constituent nationalities to determine for themselves, freely and democratically, whether to remain a part of it or not. Countless declarations of human rights include this right and Spain's open violation of it should prevent any democratic state from enforcing its courts' ruling on this question.

After Puigdemont was allowed by a Belgian court to stay in the country in relative safety, the Spanish police issued yet another European arrest warrant against him in March 2018. They hoped to arrest him whilst he was travelling outside Belgium to attend a conference in Finland. Denmark let him pass without hindrance. Only in Germany did Holstein Provincial Crime Bureau (LKA), acting as Spain's High Court bailiffs, arrest him in a motorway service station. A German court has decided to keep him in detention whilst the Spanish authorities move for his extradition. This it seems is what democracy looks like in the European Union.

The main charge against Puigdemont is rebellion (against the Spanish central government) plus embezzlement, since the independence referendum cost 6 million euros. This insolent charge includes the cost of the deployment of the Spanish police, the Guardia Civil, which tried force the closure of polling stations and assaulted voters. Thus, according to Spanish Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy and the High Court, the holding of a vote on the right to self-determination was in itself a violation of the law - a striking proof of the political continuity of the Spanish justice system and its state apparatus with 40 years of the Franco dictatorship.

Since his flight from Barcelona, Puigdemont has spent most of his time in Belgium. There, various separatist bourgeois parties (e.g. the N-VA) are also part of the government. Here, Puigdemont was allowed to continue to participate in Spanish and Catalan politics, with some tolerance. In theory, he remains the only candidate for prime minister since the new elections in Catalonia imposed by Madrid in December. These once again resulted in the anti-independence parties failing to gain a majority in the regional parliament. The province, therefore, remains under the rule of Madrid under Article 155, which suspends the Statute of Autonomy.

The Spanish government under Rajoy, itself a minority in the Madrid Cortes, but which has, shamefully, secured the tolerance of the Social Democracy (PSOE) as well as the right-wing Ciudadanos, and also has their support for the coercive measures and legal proceedings against key members of the Catalan parties who could form a new regional

government. Nine of them are currently in custody.

Everything that now follows in Barcelona in terms of violence, all injuries, all possible victims, will also be the fault of the German justice system, the "Jamaica" coalition in Kiel (capital of Schleswig-Holstein) and, of course, the German Federal government, which sided with Rajoy. They may also pass on the formal responsibility for extradition to the courts. For German imperialism, Spain is a strategic partner, however much the Catalan nationalists appeal to Germany and the EU.

We unconditionally support the demands to immediately release Puigdemont and refuse to extradite him. Just one week after the International Day of the Political Prisoner, the democratic rights of the regional government of Catalonia and its members must be defended. For the fight in Catalonia, against direct rule from Madrid and against the entire Rajoy regime, however, it is crucial to reorient the movement in Catalonia itself politically.

Finally, the "separatists" find themselves in a crisis of orientation, which has two, interrelated, causes. First, the protest movement must break with political submission to bourgeois parties. The former neoliberal regional government of Puigdemont is not a strategic ally.

Secondly, the movement should reorient itself and campaign not for complete national independence, which half the population of Catalonia opposes, but for a common struggle to defend democratic rights, including the existing autonomy of the province and its parliament and government, its democratic right to self-determination, plus the social demands of the workers and small farmers and the other Spanish regions.

As revolutionaries, we unconditionally defend the right of national self-determination (including the right to found a state of our own). But, especially in view of the divided attitude of the working class in the country itself, we consider the creation of workers' unity against the Spanish government and the common struggle for a socialist revolution in Spain to be the correct strategic orientation. Otherwise there is the danger that nationalist poison will continue to pit Catalans and "Spaniards" against each other, making workers the pawns either of Rajoy or Puigdemont.

No handover of Puigdemont to Spanish Injustice!

Freedom for all political prisoners in the Spanish state!

For a joint fight against Rajoy by the Catalans and all the peoples of the Spanish state!

Down with the Monarchy, the High Court and Senate and all the remnants of the Franco regime!

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