

Catalunya's Struggle for Independence

and its Pseudo-“Left-Wing” Critiques

A discussion of the nature of the Catalans' liberation struggle, the particular character of the imperialist Spanish State and the perspectives for revolutionaries

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Contents

Introduction

The pseudo-leftists case against the Catalan's struggle for independence as a supposed uproar of a privileged province

Can Catalunya's case for independence be compared with the reactionary *Lega Nord* campaign in Lombardy and Veneto?

Catalunya – a wealthy province compared to Madrid?

Does Catalunya already have sufficient autonomy rights?

Is the big Catalan bourgeoisie the driving force behind separatism?

Is the Spanish State is a “normal” capitalist state or is it an imperialist “*prison of the people*”?

Would an independent capitalist Catalunya constitute a small imperialist state?

Does the independence struggle split the working class of Spain?

Some final remarks on the perspectives for revolutionaries

Introduction

Without any doubt, the focus of Europe's class struggle currently lies in Catalunya (we use here the Catalan name for Catalonia). This is a struggle for national self-determination and freedom against the most obvious and blatant violation of fundamental democratic rights at the hands of the Spanish State.

The RCIT has always supported the right of national self-determination for the Catalan people, as well as that of the Basque people, including the right to form their own state. When, through mass mobilizations of no less than one million people, it became clear that the majority of the Catalans and Basques desire separation from the Spanish oppressor state and wish to create their own republics, the RCIT unequivocally supported their demand for independence. ¹

During the recent escalation we have unconditionally supported the Catalans' struggle for independence and combined this with a revolutionary perspective of class struggle for a Catalan Workers' Republic, in contrast and as opposed to bourgeois nationalism. ²

Such an approach is not only the sole way to satisfy the wishes of the Catalan people, but also to create a fraternal unity of the Catalan and the Spanish working class based on freedom and equality and without any discrimination and mistrust.

Our program in support of the national liberation struggle of the Catalan people is based on the communist tradition. Lenin elaborated the Marxist position on the right of national self-determination in his writings:

"Victorious socialism must necessarily establish a full democracy and, consequently, not only introduce full equality of nations but also realise the right of the oppressed nations to self-determination, i.e., the right to free political separation." ³

¹ For example, in 2014 we wrote: "Against the backdrop of the deepening economic and political crisis of capitalism, the *national question in Europe* takes on greater significance. As in all other democratic issues, Marxists have to differentiate between the aspirations of an oppressed, discriminated against, or non-equal nation and those of oppressor or privileged nation. Therefore the RCIT supports the legitimate struggles of the former and vehemently opposes those of the latter. We support the right of national self-determination for the discriminated nations. This means that we call for equality in terms language rights, access to the state resources, etc. In those cases where the majority of a non-equal nation wishes an independent state, Marxists have to support this. Thus they call for an *independent workers' republic* for the given nation and combine this with the slogan of *United Socialist States of Europe*. Furthermore, they have to launch vehement *agitation* against nationalism and for the international unity of the working class. In other cases, Marxists will support the call for autonomy and forms of self-government of the respective territories. Such support for national and democratic rights has to be applied to all non-equal nations, irrespective of whether they are situated within imperialist or semi-colonial states, and regardless of whether they would, after secession, find themselves within another imperialist or a semi-colonial state (if the working class cannot take power in time). This is only logical since all democratic demands against discrimination – like equal rights for women, youth, lesbian and gays, etc – apply not only to the working class members of these groups but also those of the middle class and the bourgeoisie.

Based on this methodological approach, the RCIT supports the desire of the Basque and the Catalan people to leave the oppressive Spanish state and to form their own republics. We say: "*For an independent Workers Republic of Catalonia and of the Basque Country!*" The harsh long-time suppression of the Basque nationalists by the Spanish state and the recent decision of Madrid to ban the planned referendum on independence in Catalonia demonstrate that the national question in Spain has an explosive democratic character. The Spanish workers' movement must mobilize against the reactionary Spanish state and at the same time advocate the joint workers' struggle against the austerity offensive of the PP government. On the other hand, there are also reactionary separatist movements like the Venetian one. This is reactionary campaign of a privileged non-nation which must be resolutely opposed by the workers' movement." (RCIT: Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation. Escalation of Inner-Imperialist Rivalry Marks the Opening of a New Phase of World Politics, April 2014, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 22, pp. 44-45, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2014/>)

² On this, see the various RCIT documents on the recent crisis in Catalonia cited at the end of this article.

Later, this approach was included in the official program of the Bolshevik Party in 1919:

*“In order to remove mistrust felt on the part of the working class masses of the oppressed countries towards the proletariat of those states which oppressed them, it is necessary to abolish all privileges of any national group, to proclaim the full equality of nations and to recognize the rights of colonies and dependent nations to state separation.”*⁴

In the following essay, we want to elaborate some thoughts on the meaning of the national liberation struggle of the Catalan people. In particular, we will debate some arguments which have been raised by “Marxist” opponents or half-heartedly supporters of the Catalan’s struggle for independence.

³ V. I. Lenin: *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* (1916); in: *LCW* 22, p. 143

⁴ Program of the RKP(B): adopted March 22, 1919 at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist Party; in: Robert H. McNeal and Richard Gregor: *Resolutions and decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Vol.2, The Early Soviet Period: 1917-1929*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto 1974, p.61

The pseudo-leftists case against the Catalan's struggle for independence as a supposed uproar of a privileged province

Some pseudo-“Marxists” denounce the Catalan struggle for independence as the uproar of a privileged province. They claim that this struggle is primarily motivated by their desire to pay fewer taxes to the central Spanish government as well as by the Catalan people's disdain for poor provinces like Andalusia. As a result, such critics equate the Catalan independence movement with the Lega Nord in Italy's Lombardy and Veneto.

Here are a few examples. Dimitris Bellantis, an ex-member of the Central Committee of SYRIZA in Greece, recently published an article at the website of the left-wing US magazine *CounterPunch*. He reminds his readers of the supposedly reactionary secessionist movement of the Kosovars against the Serbian state – in fact he is only reminding us of his Greek chauvinist adaption to the Serbian oppressor state which brutally subjugated the Kosovo Albanians for nearly a century. Concerning the Catalans' desire for independence he writes:

*“Without the misuse and usurpation of that radical Catalan tradition of the past how different and how much more radical would the Catalan independence cause look than the cause of the Lega Lombarda's “free Lombardy” in Italy or the cause of “free Flanders” in Belgium? How much more supportable? Isn't it a case of the living wearing the dresses of the dead, as Marx formulated it in his classic work ‘The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte ’?”*⁵

The British pseudo-Trotskyist grouplet *“Socialist Fight”* is blowing into the same horn. Remaining faithful to its social-imperialist disdain for revolutionary democratic uprisings of oppressed peoples, like those in Syria, *SF* goes even further. Quoting approvingly a prominent representative of the neoliberal chauvinist Spanish *Ciudadanos* party, which supports the Rajoys coup, and with the help of the notorious Article 155, they unconvincingly suggest that we compare the Catalan independence movement with the semi-fascist EuroMaidan movement in the Ukraine in the spring of 2014!

“Win or lose, separatists could still take to the streets, warned Francesc de Carreras, a constitutional lawyer who helped launch Ciudadanos, a party firmly opposed to independence. “We should at least be ready for a Catalan version of Maidan,” he said, referring to the square in Kiev that became the centre of the Ukrainian ‘revolution’ in February 2014. “It could create an even more unpredictable and tense situation,” he said. “But the right to protest must also be respected in a democracy.” And there you have the rightist essence of the movement, as in the Maidan, a few foolish leftists were swept along with that movement in February 2014, as they were in the “revolution” against Morsi in Egypt a year earlier. When all those right-wing mass movements went so horribly wrong, in fact revealed their essence in the outcomes they produced, our “Marxists” were totally unable to explain and refused to examine their own errors.”

6

⁵ Dimitris Bellantis: On Catalonia: Debates in the Greek Left, October 18, 2017, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/10/18/on-catalonia-debates-in-the-greek-left/>. A similar point is made by an US academic, Benjamin Studebaker: *“But this isn't really about Catalonia versus Madrid—it's about Catalonia versus Andalusia. (...) In the Catalan case, an independent Catalonia would mean that the Spanish government would have less tax revenue to redistribute to poor and working people in places like Andalusia.”* (The Left-Wing Case Against Catalan Independence, 22.9.2017, <https://benjaminstudebaker.com/2017/09/22/the-left-wing-case-against-catalan-independence/>)

⁶ Socialist Fight: The Rights of Nations to Self-determination: Catalonia's Referendum and the Spanish State, 06/10/2017, <https://socialistfight.com/2017/10/06/the-rights-of-nations-to-self-determination-catalonias-referendum-and-the-spanish-state/>

It is certainly true that those Catalan capitalists and their compatriots of the upper-middle class who support the call for independence have not only national self-determination but also their own economic advantage in mind, like hoping to pay fewer taxes. This is, however, true for *every* capitalist and upper-middle class in *all* countries of the world where people who are discriminated against desire independence! The Chinese capitalists, the Irish middle class or the African businessmen who gave tacit support for the anti-colonial struggle in the 20th century certainly did this for similar selfish reasons! It is only the foolish Stalinists and petty-bourgeois nationalists who believe in the selfless motives of the bourgeoisie and the upper-middle class (in order to justify their *own* illusions), which in turn leads to the political subordination of the working class to these privileged classes.

In other words, for Marxists, the support of sectors of the capitalists and the upper-middle class for an independence movement is in itself neither an argument for nor against support by us. The decisive issue is whether a given movement for national self-determination represents or does not represent the desire of an oppressed or "*dependent and underprivileged nation*" (Lenin).⁷

⁷ V. I. Lenin: Draft Theses on National and Colonial Questions for the Second Congress of the Communist International (1920), in: Lenin's Collected Works (LCW), Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, Vol. 31, p. 148, <http://marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jun/05.htm>

Can Catalunya's case for independence be compared with the reactionary *Lega Nord* campaign in Lombardy and Veneto?

Hence, any analogy between the situation of Catalunya and the reactionary *Lega Nord* campaign in Lombardy and Veneto is, in the best case, an expression of pure ignorance and, in the worst, a chauvinist assault against the Catalan people.

First, the Catalans constitute a nation. Even Spain's anti-democratic post-Francoist constitution of 1978 recognizes the existence of the Catalans and the Basques as nationalities. The inhabitants of Lombardy and Veneto, while possessing a specific regional and cultural identity, do not constitute a nation separate from the Italian nation. Leaving aside the leaders of the extreme right-wing and racist *Lega Nord*, no one in Italy would characterize the people of Lombardy and Veneto as separate "nationalities."

Secondly, the Catalan (as well as the Basque) minorities have been historically oppressed and underprivileged nations. For centuries they have been discriminated against by the Castilian-dominated ruling class of the Spain state and its centralist bureaucratic apparatus. Their language and their culture have been suppressed and historic Catalan leaders, like Lluís Companys, have been murdered by Madrid.

This is why Marxists, as Trotsky already elaborated in his writings on Spain in the 1930s, have historically recognized the duty to defend the Catalan's national and democratic right against the imperialist Spanish State.

"But what has been said does not at all diminish the progressive revolutionary-democratic character of the Catalanian national struggle—against the Spanish great-power spirit, bourgeois imperialism and bureaucratic centralism. It must not be left out of sight for a minute that Spain as a whole and Catalonia in particular are at present governed not by Catalanian national-democrats but by Spanish bourgeois-imperialists in alliance with the landowners, old bureaucrats in general, with the support of the Spanish national-socialists. This whole fraternity stands, on the one hand, for the continued subjugation of the Spanish colonies and, on the other—for the maximum bureaucratic centralization of Spain itself, that is, for the suppression by the Spanish bourgeoisie of the Catalanians, the Basques, etc. At the given stage of developments, with the given combination of class forces, Catalanian nationalism is a progressive-revolutionary factor. Spanish nationalism is a reactionary-imperialist factor. The Spanish Communist who does not understand this difference, ignores it, does not advance it to the front rank, but on the contrary, covers up its significance, risks becoming an unconscious agent of the Spanish bourgeoisie and is lost to the cause of the proletarian revolution." ⁸

Nothing like this can be said about the Italian provinces Lombardy and Veneto. The North has always dominated the country since the foundation of the modern Italian nation-state in 1870 and if there is something like a historically discriminated part of Italy, it is the South. The Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci even characterized Italy's South – the *Mezzogiorno* – and its islands like Sicily and Sardinia as "*internal colonies*". In his famous study on "*The Southern Question*", he elaborates on the Italian communists' statement written in 1920: "*The Northern bourgeoisie has subjugated the South of Italy and the Islands, and reduced them to exploitable colonies.*" ⁹

⁸ Leon Trotsky: *The Progressive Character of Catalan Nationalism* (1931), in: Leon Trotsky: *The Spanish Revolution* (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 110, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain03.htm>

⁹ On this see, e.g., Antonio Gramsci: *Some Aspects of the Southern Question* (1926), in: Antonio Gramsci. *Selections from Political Writings 1921-1926*, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd, London 1978, pp. 441-462

Catalunya – a wealthy province compared to Madrid?

Another argument of the pseudo-Marxist opponents of Catalunya's independence is that the region is wealthy with a higher income per capita than the average for Spain. It is certainly true that Catalunya belongs to the economically most developed parts of Spain. Without going into details, we note that this is part of the historic peculiarities of the Spanish state. Both most oppressed parts – Catalunya and Euskadi (Basque Country) – are those areas where capitalism and the creation of a proletariat took place much earlier than in other parts of the country. The Castillian ruling class in Madrid, with its backward and enlarged absolutist state apparatus, had to impose a bureaucratic centralist control on the country resulting in national oppression of these nationalities in order to profit from their advanced economic development.¹⁰

With 7.45 million people, the province of Catalunya accounts for 16% of Spain's population and generates more than one-fifth of the Spanish GDP. It has a GDP per person of €26,996 while the country's average is €22,780. Its exports of €65.2bn represent more than one-quarter of Spain's total. Likewise it attracts more than one-quarter of inward investment to Spain. Furthermore, Catalunya has lower unemployment and generally less income inequality than the rest of Spain. We add, as a side note, that the Basque territories Euskadi (Basque Country, in Spanish: País Vasco) and Navarra, have an even higher per capita incomes (€29,683 and €28,124 respectively).

However, while Catalunya has a per capita GDP greater than the Spanish average, it is worth noting that it is significantly lower than that of Madrid – the dominant region of the country – which is indisputably the wealthiest of all. (See Table 1)

Table 1. Spain: GDP per person in selected regions of Spain, in Euros, year 2014¹¹

Madrid	31,004
País Vasco (Basque Country)	29,683
Navarra	28,124
Catalonia	26,996
Andalusia	16,884
<i>Spain average</i>	<i>22,780</i>

In other words, even if Catalunya is relatively a wealthy region, the Castillian oppressor in Madrid is even wealthier.

Irrespective of this, it is nonsensical for Marxists to judge the legitimacy of a people's desire for independence according to the level of economic development. As every historian knows, Poland and Finland were economically much more developed than the Russian Empire before 1917, since capitalist development started in these two former countries earlier. This however, did not prevent the Russian

¹⁰ On this see, e.g., Angel Smith: *The Origins of Catalan Nationalism, 1770–1898*; Julie Marfany: *Land, Proto-Industry and Population in Catalonia, c. 1680–1829 An Alternative Transition to Capitalism?* Ashgate Publishing Limited, Farnham 2012; Albert Balcells: *Catalan Nationalism – Past and Present*, Palgrave, New York 1996; Walther L. Bernecker, Horst Pietschmann: *Geschichte Spaniens – von der frühen Neuzeit bis zur Gegenwart*, Verlag W. Kohlhammer, Stuttgart 1993

¹¹ Instituto Nacional de Estadística: *Spanish Regional Accounts. Base 2010. Regional Gross Domestic Product. Year 2014*, 27 March 2015, p. 3

Bolsheviks from fighting for Poland's and Finland's rights to separate from Russia and to create their own state. Lenin emphasized this internationalist and anti-chauvinist position numerous times:

*"Russian socialists who do not demand freedom to separate for Finland, Poland, the Ukraine, etc., etc.—that such socialists act as chauvinists and lackeys of bloodstained and filthy imperialist monarchies and the imperialist bourgeoisie."*¹²

¹² V.I.Lenin: The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination (1916), in: LCW Vol. 22, p. 154.

Does Catalunya already have sufficient autonomy rights?

Some argue that Catalunya already has sufficient national rights. But let's examine the reality. The Catalans approved a new *Statute of Autonomy of Catalonia* by referendum, with a ¾ majority, in June 2006. This new law, among others, accepted the existence of Catalunya as a nation. However, the Castillian-dominated Constitutional Court of Spain effectively smashed this law in 2010 which provoked the regular mass mobilizations of more than one million people which we have witnessed in the region since then. These mobilizations took place under the apt slogan "*Som una nació. Nosaltres decidim*" ("We are a nation. We decide").

Catalunya's subordinated position is even clearer in the present situation. Just take the brutal assault of the paramilitary Guardia Civil against the independence referendum on 1 October which resulted, according to the Catalan health department, in 1,066 people injured (23 of them older than 79 years of age and two under 11)!¹³ What was the crime of the Catalan people? Exercising their right to vote peacefully in a referendum! And there are numerous other examples like the imprisonment of the ANC leader (Jordi Sànchez) and Òmnium Cultural's (Jordi Cuixart) for purely political reasons and the closure of 140 pro-independence websites.¹⁴ The hatred of Castillian chauvinists for the Catalans even takes such bizarre proportions as the opening of disciplinary proceedings against the Catalan club *Reus* by the Spanish Football Federation for displaying a large *senyera* (official Catalan flag) at a football match, on the grounds that this could provoke "*violence, racism, xenophobia or intolerance*"!¹⁵

How can a people be free if the central government has the power, under Article 155 of Spain's constitution, to dissolve, with one stroke, the regional government and parliament, to transfer the regional treasury to the finance ministry in Madrid, to pressurize companies to leave the region¹⁶, etc.?!¹⁷

Finally, take the Spanish constitution, which legitimizes all these rabid chauvinist forms of oppression against the Catalan people as well as against the Basque people. It explicitly states "*the Spanish Nation*" (a formulation which explicitly denies the fact that the Catalans and the Basques are separate nations) constitutes an "*indissoluble unity*". It states in Section 2:

¹³ On this see the excellent and highly informative blog of Dick Nichols, the European correspondent of the Australian left-wing paper Green Left Weekly, who is stationed in Barcelona: "Live Blog: Catalonia independence struggle", <https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/live-blog-catalonia-independence-struggle>. We note, as an aside, that the massive scale of the brutal attack by the Guardia Civil against the Catalan referendum does not stop the ex-Trotskyist "League for the 5 International" to belittle this horrific events of 1 October, claiming that the police made no serious effort to stop the referendum: "*That explains the fact that the police operation on Sunday, whilst incontestably brutal, was more about making a demonstration than actually suppressing the vote. The vast majority of the police remained confined to quarters, and the Spanish state made no serious effort to actually stop the vote going ahead.*" This is consistent with the idea of this organization, which is opposed to Catalunya's independence, that the Catalan people in their majority are opposed to independence: "*Had a legal and democratic referendum taken place, it would likely have gone against the separatists and settled the question.*" (L5I: Defend democracy in Spain and Catalonia, 04/10/2017, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/defend-democracy-spain-and-catalonia>)

¹⁴ ANC is the Catalan acronym for *Assemblea Nacional Catalana* (Catalan National Assembly).

¹⁵ See Live Blog: Catalonia independence struggle

¹⁶ Even the car manufacturer SEAT, based in the Catalan city of Martorell, denounces the Spanish government and its "monarchical" pressure to relocate its headquarters out of Catalonia! See on this Dick Nichols Live Blog

¹⁷ On Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, see: Creede Newton: What is Article 155 of the 1978 Spanish Constitution? Al Jazeera, 19.10.2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/article-155-spanish-constitution-171019100117592.html>

*“The Constitution is based on the indissoluble unity of the Spanish Nation, the common and indivisible homeland of all Spaniards.”*¹⁸

This formulation means nothing less than the rejection of any nationality within the Spanish state to exercise its right of national self-determination which, by definition, includes the right to secede from the state. In short, Catalunya is not free – neither in legal nor in practical terms.

¹⁸ La Moncloa. Constitution of Spain, Preliminary Title,
http://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/espana/leyfundamental/Paginas/titulo_preliminar.aspx

Is the big Catalan bourgeoisie the driving force behind separatism?

Another argument by the pseudo-Marxist opponents of Catalunya's independence is the claim that the big Catalan bourgeoisie is behind the mass campaign for separation. This is however not true, as the Josep Maria Antentas, a progressive professor of sociology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, points out in an informative article published by the US-American *Jacobin* magazine:

"The high bourgeoisie has opposed the independence process from the beginning and consistently attempted from behind the scenes to derail it." ¹⁹

This has been also been demonstrated by the mass and rapid departure of about 700 corporations that transferred their headquarters out of Catalunya in the past weeks. The big capitalists' opposition to independence also becomes clear when we see the huge pressure they placed on Catalunya's Prime Minister Carles Puigdemont resulting in his vacillation on declaring independence. This reactionary opposition of big capital against independence also became evident during the general strike on 3 October when the bosses exerted huge pressure on the workers not to join the protests.

No, the social basis of the mass movement for independence is the lower middle class, the youth and the majority of the working class. The involvement of the proletariat is particularly remarkable given the strong pressure of the reformist, pro-Spanish chauvinist trade union bureaucracy of both federations, the CCOO and UGT, against the independence movement. This however did not prevent the pro-independence trade union activists from organizing themselves as the left-wing *Alternative Interunion Committee of Catalonia* which unites numerous branches of different trade unions in the region.

¹⁹ Josep María Antentas: Catalonia's Decision, *Jacobin*, 2 October 2017, <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/09/catalonia-independence-referendum-spain-podemos>

Is the Spanish State is a “normal” capitalist state or is it an imperialist “prison of the people”?

It is important to bear in mind that Spain is not a “normal” capitalist state for two reasons. First it is an imperialist state with a long and extremely brutal history of colonialism in Latin America, Africa and Asia. In Latin America, Spanish colonial rule led to the death of 8.5 out of 10 million indigenous people in the years 1519 to 1564. While its capitalist economy developed belatedly and, hence, as a weaker imperialist state compared with, let’s say, France or Germany, it has nevertheless the fourth-largest economy in the Eurozone. It is home for a number of globally active multinational corporations like *Banco Santander*, *Telefónica*, or *BBVA-Banco Bilbao Vizcaya* which were ranked among the top 100 corporations in the *Forbes Global 2000* list in 2011.²⁰

Capital export plays an important role in big Spanish capital, as is reflected by its Foreign Direct Investment Outward Stock being 41.9% of its GDP, which is higher than the level of Italy (24.9%) and Germany (39.4%).²¹

In short, the Spanish state is an imperialist power, albeit not of the first order like the US, UK, Germany or France.

In addition, the Spanish state is not even a bourgeois democratic republic, but a state which combines parliamentary democracy with a reactionary monarchy at its top. The recent speeches of King Felipe VI, with his chauvinist denunciation of the Catalan’s desire for independence, are a powerful demonstration of the reactionary nature of this monarchy. Catalunya’s struggle for independence has therefore also an additional democratic character, as it is a struggle to free the Catalan people from the monarchist system.

Furthermore, it is a state with a large share of minority nationalities and, for this reason, a strong tradition of bureaucratic centralism and rabid chauvinism. According to official figures Catalan (or Valencian) is spoken by 17%, Galician by 5% and Basque by 2% of all Spaniards. In fact, these numbers could be higher, as a report published by Catalunya’s government indicates. (See Table 2)

“In Spain there are 18.4 million people living in regions with more than one official language. This represents 41.3% of the total population of the State, which includes the regions of the autonomous communities of Catalonia, the Balearic Islands, the Comunitat Valenciana, Galicia, the Basque Country and Navarra. It is also necessary to highlight two other regions, with 2.3 million inhabitants, where in addition to Castilian other languages are spoken which have not achieved official status in their respective autonomous statutes. These are Aragon (where Castilian, Catalan and Aragonese are spoken, in different parts of the region) and Asturias, where Asturian is spoken.”²²

²⁰ Forbes: Forbes Global 2000, Values calculated April 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/global2000/list/>

²¹ UNCTAD: FDI outward stock as a percentage of GDP 1990-2016, <http://unctad.org/en/Pages/DIAE/World%20Investment%20Report/Annex-Tables.aspx>

²² Generalitat de Catalunya: Catalan, language of Europe, p. 25

Table 2. Autonomous communities in which there is more than one official language ²³

Autonomous Community	Population	% of Spain
Catalonia	7,134,697	16.0
Balearic Islands	1,001,062	2.2
Comunitat Valenciana	4,806,908	10.8
Galicia	2,767,524	6.2
Basque Country	2,133,684	4.8
Navarra	601,874	1.3
Total	18,445,749	41.3

If we add to this the fact that 11-12% of Spain's population are migrants, it becomes even more obvious that the country's population has an extraordinary multinational composition. Hence, the dominance of the Castilian-dominated bourgeoisie and its state apparatus can only be maintained by massive national oppression and bureaucratic centralism of these minorities.

In other words, it is crucial to understand that the Spanish state is not a "normal" capitalist state. It is a state dominated by the imperialist Castilian bourgeoisie which, from its inception, discriminated and oppressed ethnic and national minorities like the Catalans, the Basques or the Galicians.

While it would take us too far afield to go into this in detail, we wish to remark that this Castilian chauvinist character of the Spanish state is a result of its peculiar history. The total defeat of an early bourgeois revolution of the cities in 1520/21 as well as of later rebellions against the absolutist reign in Madrid – both in Catalunya as well as other parts of the country – helped to foster a strong and arch-reactionary feudalist regime with very strong ties to the Catholic Church. The notorious Spanish Inquisition which began in 1478 and was absolutely abolished only in 1834, and which prosecuted about 150,000 persons, was also an important feature of the absolutist monarchy in Spain.

Likewise there was the vicious campaign of coerced Christianization, accompanied by numerous pogroms, which finally resulted in the complete expulsion of its non-Christian minorities like the Muslims (up to one million people) and the Jews (up to 350,000 people). This, too, was an early and bloody hallmark of Spanish chauvinism.

Furthermore, the Spanish state was characterized by its late unification with the long enduring relative autonomy of the Kingdoms of Aragon and Navarra. At the same time, it was precisely the regions of its ethnic/national minorities – such as the Basque Country, Catalunya, and Galicia – which experienced an industrial revolution in the 19th century earlier than in the rest of Spain. In the second half of the 19th century, about 80% of Spain's industry was located in these regions (40% in Catalunya alone) and only 20% in the central regions of the country. ²⁴

Hence, a Castilian-dominated backward center in Madrid could only keep power over the economically more advanced minorities by imposing strict authoritarian centralization over them.

For all these reasons the Spanish state has always been a "prison of the people" and remains so until today.

²³ Generalitat de Catalunya: Catalan, language of Europe, p. 26

²⁴ Walther L. Bernecker, Horst Pietschmann: Geschichte Spaniens, p. 245

Would an independent capitalist Catalunya constitute a small imperialist state?

Let us deal in this context briefly with the question what would be the class character of an independent Catalunya. Given the fact that this region is an industrial and commercial center and home to many domestic and foreign corporations, it is a realistic possibility that an independent capitalist state Catalunya could become a small imperialist state.

We don't need to repeat that socialists in Catalunya have to fight strongly against such an outcome. They have to rally the working class against not only the Spanish bourgeoisie but also against the Catalan bourgeoisie. They have to strive for the creation of an independent Workers Republic of Catalunya.

However, we remark en pass  that the possibility of a failure of such a perspective and the creation of a capitalist or even imperialist independent Catalunya certainly would not constitute a legitimate reason to withdraw support for the national liberation struggle. Is a strong imperialist state of Spain better? Anyway, socialists can only influence the outcome of the independence struggle if they join the popular masses fighting for their legitimate national rights and not by staying aside.

Nevertheless we want to point out that it is by far not certain that an independent capitalist Catalunya would have an imperialist character. Given the current massive flight of capital from Catalunya (as we stated above about 700 companies have already departed in the past weeks) when the independence process has only be announced but by far not implemented and given the opposition by most of Catalunya's big bourgeoisie, it is not very likely that an independent capitalist republic would have an imperialist character. This is even more the case if the imperialist European Union continues its unconditional support for the Spanish state and its suppression of the Catalans.

Therefore, one has to take into account the negative economic effects of an ongoing hostile stand of the Spanish state as well as the European Union against an independent capitalist Catalunya. Hence, it is quite possible that such an independent capitalist Catalunya would be rather an advanced semi-colonial country.

Let us remark as an aside that it has always been a daydream of the bourgeois Catalan nationalists that they could achieve independence with the consent of Madrid and Brussels so that they could start a happy life as a new capitalist state "as part of the European family". Spain's ruling class can not accept independence because it would weaken its state and economy too much and furthermore it could encourage similar mass movements for national self-determination in the rest of Spain (as we have seen above there are several other discriminated people in the Spanish state). And the European Union does not want to recognize Catalunya's independence because it needs a strong Spanish state and because it fears that this could encourage similar movements in other European countries.

Does the independence struggle split the working class of Spain?

Let us finally deal with another argument of the pseudo-Marxist opponents of Catalunya's independence. They refer to the multi-ethnic character of the working class in Catalunya as well as to the dangers of a split of the proletariat in Spain along nationalist lines.

For example the *League for the Fifth International* (L5I), which increasingly forgets its revolutionary roots, writes: *"Nevertheless, we also need to be aware that this conflict could well unleash dangerous and destructive forces of national chauvinism, dividing and poisoning the consciousness of the working class and youth of the entire Spanish state. It is no wonder that both Rajoy and Puigdemont head neoliberal, right wing, bourgeois parties and will be delighted to see the workers and other progressive forces divided and pitted against one another."*²⁵

And in another article, these comrades state: *"Therefore a unilateral and irrevocable declaration of independence by the parliamentary majority, let alone by Carles Puigdemont as President of the autonomous regional authority, would run the danger of splitting the population into those for and against complete independence. (...) Given the circumstances in which the referendum was organised and conducted, the result, whilst high, is not a qualitative change from the 40 to 45 per cent reputable opinion polls showed to be in favour of independence, and is clearly not a mandate for secession. (...) The relatively weak response of the organised working class on October 3 indicates that any unilateral declaration of independence, which Puigdemont insists will come in a few days, will not have the support of a majority of Catalans or of the working class of the province. (...) The first victim of the conflict between Spanish chauvinists and Catalan nationalists has been the working class across the peninsula."*²⁶

As a matter of fact we have to point out that the multi-ethnic character of the working class in Catalunya is not a new phenomenon but has been the case throughout the whole history of the region's capitalist development. Such, for example, in 1900 23% of all workers in Barcelona and 31% in 1920 came from other provinces.²⁷

This, however, has never stopped Marxists to support Catalonia's right of national self-determination. Trotsky made this very clear in his programmatic work on the Spanish Revolution in 1931.

*"However, precisely in order to draw the line between the nationally, oppressed workers and peasants and their bourgeoisie, the proletarian vanguard must occupy the boldest and sincerest position in the question of national self-determination. The workers will fully and completely defend the right of the Catalonians and Basques to lead an independent state life, in the event that the majority of these nationalities have expressed themselves for complete separation."*²⁸

Of course, Marxists do not light-mindedly support the separation and the creation of a new state. They do so only if the majority of a given nation wishes to do so. In the 1930s, Trotsky did not positively advocate Catalunya's independence as he did not consider it as clear that the majority of the Catalan people wish for this.

²⁵ L5I: Spain: Defeat Rajoy's coup against Catalonia, 21/09/2017, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/spain-defeat-rajoy%E2%80%99s-coup-against-catalonia>

²⁶ L5I: Defend democracy in Spain and Catalonia, 04/10/2017, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/defend-democracy-spain-and-catalonia>

²⁷ Walther L. Bernecker, Horst Pietschmann: Geschichte Spaniens, p. 249

²⁸ Leon Trotsky: The Revolution In Spain (1931), in: Leon Trotsky: The Spanish Revolution (1931-39), Pathfinder Press, New York 1973, p. 78, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1931/spain/spain04.htm>

Today, we have a different situation. Contrary to the mythology which is spread by various economists like the L5I, the Catalan people have made clear their wish for independence. They have done this by regular mass mobilizations of more than a million in the past years – when, in comparison, the pro-Spanish chauvinists never achieved any mobilization in a similar size. Their by far most successful show of force was their demonstration on 8 October which was attended by not more than 350.000 people (including unashamed Franco admirers and Neo-Nazis). It is however important to bear in mind that this demonstration included many non-Catalan participants which were transported with buses from outside of Catalunya. In other words, even this demonstration does not reflect the real state of weak support for the pro-Spanish sector.

The Catalan people have shown their wish for independence when they elected a parliament in September 2015 in which the pro-independence parties have a majority of deputies. They have shown this even more in the historic referendum on 1 October, when more than 92.01% voted *Yes* for independence. The turnout of the referendum was 43.03% - despite a massive and brutal repression by the Spanish police. As a result of this repression the ballots of many voters were destroyed or they were actually hindered to vote at all. All in all the Catalan government estimates that 770,000 additional voters – 14.5% of all registered voters – would have been able to have their votes counted. It is simple logic that the 770,000 votes which could not be counted would have a similar 90% pro-independence result as the rest of the votes. This means an additional 13% in favor of independence to the counted 43%. Add to this the many people which did not go to the polls out of fear of repression. In short, this referendum made very clear that the majority of the Catalan people support the creation of an independent state.

This was finally confirmed once more by the huge and militant general strike on 3 October which was a powerful demonstration that the majority of the Catalan working class supports independence despite the repression of the state and despite the bureaucratic sabotage of the trade union leaderships.

Naturally, Marxists must not discount the negative influence of bourgeois Catalan nationalism. They must wage a program for full equality for all ethnical and national groups in Catalunya – in particular the numerous migrants. There are strong starting points for this since Barcelona is home of the most powerful pro-refugee solidarity movement in the whole of Europe. This has been demonstrated in numerous mass demonstrations in defense of the rights of refugees and against the imperialist fortress Europe. This shows, by the way, how absurd the accusations of numerous pseudo-left fools are which accuse the Catalan national movement as “chauvinist” and “xenophobic”. In fact, the Catalan national movement in its majority is clearly progressive and anti-racist. And it is in particular very progressive and anti-fascist if we compare it with the arch-reactionary and chauvinist pro-Spanish unity demonstrations which are always a pole of attraction for the Franco supporters!

Likewise, as we elaborated in various statements in recent weeks, Marxists in Catalunya should argue for a joint perspective of struggle of the workers in the whole of Spain.

But we strongly reject the idiotic argument that Marxists should oppose independence because it would split the working class. The working class is first and foremost split by national oppression and capitalist exploitation! It is united not by the boundary posts of an imperialist monarchy but by the struggle for joint goals against a common enemy. Such joint goals could be demands like democracy and freedom, equality, higher wages, etc. The current high state of mobilization of the Catalan working class around the issue of independence – as well as the broad sympathies they receive from the brothers and sisters in Euskadi and Galicia – are a strong factor for a higher stage of class struggle in the whole of Spain.

Some final remarks on the perspectives for revolutionaries

In fact, Catalunya is close to a pre-revolutionary situation – the first time since a very long time that we experience such a development in Western Europe! This reflects that the struggle for national liberation can be an excellent starting point to advance the class struggle. It is not a factor for splitting and weakening but of strengthening and advancing the working class struggle!

It would be foolish to underestimate the meaning of the Catalan liberation struggle not only for the class struggle in Spain but for the whole of Europe. This is a major popular uprising in one of the core countries of the imperialist European Union. This is why the political establishment of the EU unconditionally side's with the new Bonsai-Franco in Madrid. The disintegration of the Spanish State would substantially weaken the imperialist fortress Europe and could encourage popular uprisings in other countries.

It seems likely that the current crisis in Catalunya will not be over soon. Given the coward bourgeois leadership around Puigdemont and the vacillating petty-bourgeois and left-wing forces (ERC, CUP, etc.) inside the Catalan mass movement, a quick victory for the independence struggle looks unlikely. On the other hand, the central government in Madrid can not operate in political conditions – both in Spain as well as in Europe – which would allow to quickly smash the Catalan independence movement with full military force. A protracted political crisis is therefore the most likely scenario for next few months.

It is crucial that revolutionaries use the time to organize the revolutionary democratic struggle independent of and in opposition to bourgeois nationalist forces and combine it with a socialist perspective. Naturally, working inside a mass movement is impossible without applying the united front tactic towards other forces that are a legitimate part of it. Naturally, there is nothing wrong with working together with such non-revolutionary forces inside the popular movement against Rajoy's anti-democratic coup. But the most decisive task now is to organize the workers and oppressed independently of those bourgeois forces, to build mass popular assemblies and self-defense units and, most importantly, to advance the formation of a revolutionary party.

This necessitates the formulation and propagation of a clear revolutionary strategy and program. The Bible's saying "*In the beginning was the Word*" is a basic truth in revolutionary politics. Hence, it is of crucial importance for revolutionaries to spread a clear set of tactics and strategies, to fight for them inside the mass movement for independence, to bring together activists with a like-minded outlook and to create a first organized nucleus of militants on the basis of a joint program. At the beginning such a group might be small but the clarity of its program, combined with a determined intervention in the mass struggle, will assure that a larger organization and finally a combat party will emerge out of such a collective work!

In summary, authentic revolutionaries must wholeheartedly support the mass movement for Catalunya's independence. They must fight against the influence of bourgeoisie and petty-bourgeois forces inside the movement. They should advocate a program of intransigent class struggle as an alternative to the left-reformist adaption of CUP, despite the fact that it contains many socialist and revolutionary-minded activists in its ranks, towards the bourgeois forces of the *Junts pel Sí* (JxSí) alliance. Revolutionaries should argue against bourgeois nationalism and for an internationalist program of struggle for the whole of Spain and Europe. They should also unite in a revolutionary party in order to fight in an organized way against the Spanish state and against the vacillating influences inside the pro-independence popular movement. As part of such a perspective, revolutionaries must also strongly reject the arguments of the pseudo-leftist opponents of the Catalan's independence struggle.

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For the RCIT's analysis of Catalonia's struggle for independence, we refer readers to the following documents:

RCIT: Catalonia: Puigdemont & Co. fear the Consistent Struggle for Independence! After postponing the Declaration of Independence by the Catalan Government – Only Mass Actions of the Militant and Self-Organized Working Class and Oppressed can open the Road to Victory! Fight for an Independent Workers Republic of Catalonia! 11.10.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/puigdemont-fears-the-consistent-struggle-for-catalonia-s-independence/>

RCIT: Catalonia after the Referendum: Forward to Independence! 02.10.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/catalonian-referendum-was-popular-uprising/>

RCIT: Catalonia: Support the Democratic Right for Independence! For an independent Workers' Republic of Catalonia (and the Basque country)! 26.09.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/support-catalonias-independence/>

Almedina Gunić: Catalonia: This is what Democracy looks like. The Spanish ambassador in Britain explains bourgeois democracy, 23 September 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/spanish-state-in-catalonia-this-is-what-democracy-looks-like/>

Manfred Maier: 1 October 2017: Big Decision for Catalonia, 21.09.2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/big-decision-for-catalonia/>

RCIT: Catalonia: For the Immediate Release of All Arrested Officials! Stop the Criminalization of the Independence Referendum and its Supporters! Participate at the referendum and vote "Yes" for independence! Organize immediate self-defense units! 21 Sept 2017, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/europe/repression-against-catalonia/>

RCIT: Theses on Recent Major Developments in the World Situation. Escalation of Inner-Imperialist Rivalry Marks the Opening of a New Phase of World Politics, April 2014, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 22, pp. 44-45, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-april-2014/>

RCIT: The World Situation and the Tasks of the Bolshevik-Communists, March 2013, in: Revolutionary Communism No. 8, p. 40, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/world-situation-march-2013>