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Catalonia

# Defend the democratic rights of the Catalan people against an unjust sentence and against repression

- IV Online magazine - 2019 - IV537 - October 2019 -  
Publication date: Wednesday 23 October 2019

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**The publication of the Supreme Court ruling last Monday 14 October, after the trial of several independence leaders, has triggered a wave of protests in Catalonia and, to a lesser extent, in other regions of the Spanish state and even in some European cities.**

The sentence of 12 pro- independence social and political leaders, nine of them to prison sentences of between 9 and 13 years, is perceived as a collective punishment of an entire people who dared to confront the political regime of the post-Franco transition and the institutional system of the 1978 Constitution. It is an unjust and illegitimate sentence after a long judicial process loaded with irregularities and in which the magistrates used existing legislation in a regressive sense – in a logic that we can call judicial war. The “independence process” is explained to a large extent by the radicalization of very wide swathes of the Catalan population when the attempt to reform the Statute of Autonomy of 2006 was completely disfigured by the PSOE government in the Spanish Parliament. Later, this was taken to the Constitutional Court by the reactionary right represented by the PP. This was seen, far beyond traditional nationalist currents, as genuine collective humiliation and anti-democratic imposition. Thus it is unpredictable what impact the recent ruling will have in the long run and what scenarios it may open up in the future.

Remember that, after two years of pretrial detention, this sentence hands down 104 years in prison to the accused, proclaiming them guilty of sedition and embezzlement of public funds. The harshness of the sentence (globally higher in years of imprisonment than that imposed on the individuals tried and convicted for their direct participation in the military coup of 23 February 1981) and the political nature of the trial have provoked deep popular indignation in Catalonia. The key content of the sentence is that they have been condemned for a public riot and lawless behaviour for the events that took place in the months of September and October 2017. This implies a criminalization of the right to collective protest and of the exercise of fundamental rights, such as those of expression, assembly, association and demonstration. It is civil and collective disobedience that has been condemned with this sentence, which from now on will set a precedent to be applied extensively to any form of protest or peaceful resistance against the decisions, laws and sentences that may come from state authorities.

## **A new leap in political involution**

The anti-democratic regression of the post-Franco Spanish monarchy is nothing new. The LOAPA (a law destined to stop the decentralization of the State after the “failed” coup d’état of 1981), the State terrorism practiced by the governments of the PSOE in the 1980s against ETA, the “gag law” approved by Rajoy to contain the struggles of the indignant after the 15M (and which severely limits the freedom of demonstration, assembly, strike and information) and the savage repression of the referendum of 1 October 2017 in Catalonia have marked a repressive hardening of the Spanish State. Although this dynamic is already taking place at the international level as an effect of the crisis of hegemony of neoliberalism and the authoritarian hardening that accompanies it, it is no less true that the nature of the post-Franco transition, which renounced judging the crimes of the exponents of the previous regime and purging the state apparatuses coming from the dictatorship, reinforces these dynamics. Nevertheless, this sentence constitutes a real turning point, a very serious threat to social movements and the left and a very dangerous precedent for the future of democracy in the Spanish state as a whole.

## **Dynamics of mobilisation and self-organisation**

After years of massive pro-independence mobilizations and with broad support from the Catalan population (more than 80% in the polls) for the demand for the right to self-determination (also called the "right to decide"), the sentence has led to more militant and forceful mobilizations (with a repertoire of civil disobedience and cuts in communication routes of which the high point was the occupation of Barcelona airport on the 14th, mimicking the methods of struggle of Hong Kong activists) and still very largely peaceful. The general strike of last Friday 18 October, which converged with the so-called "marches for freedom" has been the most massive mobilization so far, ending in a demonstration with more than half a million participants.

## **Stop the repression: solidarity with the Catalan people!**

Nevertheless, there have been important minority clashes with the repressive forces, something unprecedented so far. These clashes have been used by the repressive forces to generalize an increasingly harsh and indiscriminate repression, particularly against the youth, with the active participation of the Catalan police as well. In a pre-electoral context, the incidents have opened a broad campaign of criminalization of independentism, and dissidence in general, which we openly denounce. Not only are extraordinary repressive methods being used that have led to 194 arrests (16% are under 18), the pretrial detention of 28 demonstrators (the attorney general's office has ordered the provisional detention of all those arrested in the midst of the riots), 576 wounded (of whom 4 have lost sight of an eye due to the shooting of riot control equipment); but there have also been numerous aggressions against the media by the police. Moreover, aggressions against demonstrators by extreme right-wing groups (sometimes with the clear connivance of the repressive forces) have also been observed, both in Catalonia and in other territories where there have been solidarity mobilisations.

Faced with the mobilizations in Catalonia, the Spanish government has no other policy than the threat of reinforcing repression and, under pressure from the right and extreme right three weeks before the new general elections, says it will not rule out any repressive scenario, including the application of the National Security Law (which would allow it to directly control the Catalan police), Article 155 of the Constitution (which would mean the abolition of Catalan autonomy) or even a state of emergency.

We call for solidarity with the forces in Catalonia and the Spanish state as a whole that are fighting for rights and freedoms against the escalation of repression and reiterate our support for a democratic solution to the ongoing political conflict, which cannot be reduced to a problem of public order.

**Freedom for political prisoners! Amnesty!**

**Release all arrested and imprisoned demonstrators!**

**For the Catalan people's right to self-determination!**

**Stop the police and fascist repression!**

*Executive Bureau of the Fourth International,*

21 October 2019

## **Defend the democratic rights of the Catalan people against an unjust sentence and against repression**

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