

Politically Charged Show Trial of Catalan Independence Supporters

By [Stephen Lendman](#)

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What's billed as Spain's "trial of the century" began in Madrid before the nation's Supreme Court on Tuesday.

On trial are 12 activist Catalan politicians - falsely charged with rebellion, misuse of public funds, and civil disobedience.

They justifiably support the universal right of self-determination, shouldn't have been arrested, imprisoned, and forced to stand trial for backing the legitimate rights of the Catalan people.

Under international law, people everywhere have the right to choose their sovereignty and political status with no outside interference.

The UN Charter affirms "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of people..."

Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) states:

"All peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development."

Article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states

"(e)veryone has the right to a nationality (self-determination). No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his (or her) nationality nor denied the right to change his (or her) nationality."

Catalans, Spanish Basques, Kurds, Palestinians, Puerto Rican activists, and others elsewhere are entitled to seek self-determination, a fundamental principle under international law, regarded as jus cogens, a higher or compelling law.

In October 2017, Catalans overwhelmingly voted for independence by national referendum. Madrid and Spain's Constitutional Court refused to recognize the results, defying international law.

A dozen Catalan separatist officials are on trial, nationally televised proceedings likely to last several months. At stake is whether Spain's Supreme Court will uphold the legitimacy of

self-determination, affirmed under international law. Results of the trial may affect other independence movements.

Individuals on trial include illegally removed Catalan Vice President Oriol Junqueras, former Catalan parliament Speaker Carme Forcadell, activist politician Jordi Sanchez, activist Jordi Cuixart, along with eight former Catalan cabinet members.

Their politically charged trial is being held before a seven-judge Supreme Court panel, the court house heavily guarded, supporters of the defendants rallying outside, chanting and carrying signs saying: "Freedom for political prisoners."

A smaller rival group disgracefully called them "coup plotters." Defense attorney for two of the accused, Andreu Van den Eyndehe, told the court that his clients have the legal right to seek independence under international law, adding self-determination "is a synonym of peace, not of war."

If convicted, defendants face up to 25 years in prison - for pursuing the legal right of the Catalan people to seek self-determination.

Seven other former Catalan officials are in self-imposed exile to avoid facing unjust prosecution, including former Catalan President Carles Puigdemont.

In Berlin on Tuesday, he called the trial a "stress test" for Spain's democracy - like America in name only.

He also asked "why (the) European Union is more concerned by what is going on...in Venezuela than what is happening in Madrid," adding:

"My political activity will be based in Belgium for the sake of freedom and independence of Catalonia and its people and ensuring its fair claims."

The German High Court of Schleswig-Holstein state (where he was living in exile) ruled he could only be extradited if charged with misuse of public funds, rejecting the charge of rebellion against him because no evidence indicated that he intended to use force to seek Catalan independence.

German prosecutors still seek to extradite him to Spain. He's subject to arrest if forced back. He vowed to continue fighting to prove his innocence, adding the German court rejected "the main lie of the state" against him, ruling that Catalonia's self-determination referendum was not rebellion as Madrid claims.

Much rides on whether Spain's Supreme Court delivers the same ruling, along with hopefully rejecting other wrongful charges against Catalan separatists on trial.

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Award-winning author Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. He is a Research Associate of the Centre for Research

on Globalization (CRG)

His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html>

Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com.

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About the author:

Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. He can be reached at lendmanstephen@sbcglobal.net. His new book as editor and contributor is titled "Flashpoint in Ukraine: US Drive for Hegemony Risks WW III."

<http://www.claritypress.com/LendmanIII.html> Visit his blog site at sjlendman.blogspot.com. Listen to cutting-edge discussions with distinguished guests on the Progressive Radio News Hour on the Progressive Radio Network. It airs three times weekly: live on Sundays at 1PM Central time plus two prerecorded archived programs.

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