

Spain's role as border guard for Fortress Europe

A Madrid correspondent
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Spain's entry into the European Union was predicated on a fundamental turn in the treatment meted out by our country to citizens coming from countries outside the geographic area of advanced capitalism.

The PSOE [the Socialist Party of former Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez] popularized--notwithstanding its supposedly leftist character--reactionary ideas such as the virtue of easy money. A Socialist Party finance minister reached the point of declaring at a press conference that Spain was--at that moment--the one country in the world where the most money could be made in the least amount of time.

Complicity with US imperialism was made synonymous with modernity. Felipe Gonzalez was not content merely to firmly anchor Spain in NATO, but made the country an accomplice in the slaughter in the Persian Gulf.

As far as his alleged Europeanism, the conception of Europe was imposed as a kind of flight to the future, with which to erase the national past, submerging it in the European myth. It was as if to say, 'If they accept us it is because we are no longer as we were--ugly, short and dark--but rather like them--beautiful, blond and millionaires.'

We are living through the results of these politics today: corruption turned into the essential element of democratic life; political power relegated to an oligarchy; and the spread of a general feeling of civic disbelief and savagery in daily life, subordinated, thanks to the corrupt work of the Socialist Party, to the categorical imperative of capitalism: the law of the strongest.

This is probably the worst legacy of the period in which the Socialist Party held power (1982-1996): the destruction of the political capital of the left, based on

the promotion of ethical values incompatible with capitalism. In its ferocious campaign to be accepted into the Club of the Rich, the PSOE did not hesitate to betray the historic memory of Spain, a country of emigrants since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, enthusiastically taking up the role of border guard of Europe.

In 1985 it approved the Aliens Law, the instrument that, despite cosmetic modifications forced by the protest of various social and trade union organizations, remains the legal means to carry out the systematic persecution of immigrants. The Schengen Agreement reinforced this role of border police of Europe by simultaneously suppressing the internal borders and turning the external borders of the European Union into a fortress.

Since then, the Strait of Gibraltar has been turned into the grave of an indeterminate number (perhaps thousands) of immigrants, subordinated to the black market in human labor power. They are charged 2 or 3 thousand dollars to cross the Strait in miserable overcrowded boats that unload their cargo upon reaching the northern shore.

If they succeed in overcoming the strong currents of the Straits and are not crushed in the intense shipping traffic, they still must manage to elude the Coast Guard in the sea and the Civil Guard once they are on land. All for the dubious privilege of finding an improbable job in the underground economy of the European Union, submitted to the double exploitation arising from their class and national condition.

The Spanish position in the 'vanguard' of the struggle against immigration to Fortress Europe is even more shocking when one considers the existence of two cities under Spanish sovereignty, Ceuta and Melilla, on the North African coast. Enslaved within Moroccan

territory, they have become human sewers through which flow the immigrants attempting to enter Europe. Successive governments have refused to take any measure to facilitate the transition of these two colonial relics to their inevitable end, Moroccan sovereignty, because of the express warnings of the army and the most reactionary sectors of Spanish society.

Despite the double control of the military and the police, and the river of money spent to seal the border with Morocco, both cities bear a growing burden of the immigration problem. This has given rise to ever-more frequent and greater altercations with an immigrant population that survives under miserable conditions, desperate to cross to Europe by any means possible.

There have been cases like those of Algerian refugees forced to return to their war-torn country to meet their fate. There were the 103 immigrants who, after staging a protest against the subhuman conditions of their detention, were drugged and shipped out on an airplane to Guinea-Bissau, the only African country that would accept them, in return for a nice sum of money. In all, during 1997 the various police agencies detained almost 17,000 undocumented immigrants in the Andalusian provinces, Ceuta and Melilla.

The other great black hole of immigration in Spain is that inhabited by the Latin American citizens. Ironically, they had a much easier time getting into Spain under the Franco dictatorship, which signed dual nationality agreements with almost all of the Latin American countries. Since Spain's entry into the European Union, the obstacles to their access to Spain has grown at the same pace as the black market in employment, which many times includes forced prostitution.

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