

Yugoslavia war intensifies political tensions in Spain

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The right-wing Spanish government has enthusiastically joined in the present NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

Spain has so far sent six F18 fighter-bombers to Yugoslavia, and made available one KC-130 Hercules for in-flight refuelling, manned by a total of 180 military personnel. Another C-212 plane is on standby at the Vicenza base in Italy. Two more F18s and a Hercules are stationed at Torrejón and Zaragoza bases and have been placed at the disposal of the Alliance. Spain also contributes the frigate *Victoria* and the tanker *Marqués de la Ensenada* to NATO's Mediterranean fleet and the frigate *Estremadura* to the European fleet. The first military action of the Spanish F18s was to bomb fuel depots in the airport of Podgorica (Montenegro) and military shelters near Belgrade.

There are already 1,100 Spanish soldiers in Bosnia-Herzegovina and a further 400 military personnel have been dispatched to Albania, accompanied by an amphibious warship. Military conscription still operates in Spain.

The Spanish government of José María Aznar has authorised the deployment by the US of up to 40 KC-135 planes from the base at Morón de la Frontera (Seville). The authorisation extends to over-flying, landing and resting of crews in Torrejón (near Madrid) and Rota (Cadiz).

Last month, the majority of the Spanish parliamentary groups gave their full backing to the government and the Secretary General of NATO, Javier Solana, for the decision to bomb Yugoslavia. This was ratified in parliament on April 15 by a full vote in Congress. The parties voting in support of the war were: Aznar's Popular Party (PP), Socialist Party (PSOE), Convergencia I Unió (CiU--Catalan regionalists),

Coalición Canaria (Canary Island regionalists) and Nueva Izquierda (a split from the PSOE), as well as some smaller parties. The only exceptions were Izquierda Unida (IU--United Left) and Bloque Nacionalista Galego, who voted against. But both have a very small number of deputies.

Spain's government is led by the right-wing Popular Party in alliance with the Basque and Catalan nationalists. It came to power in 1996 as a direct result of the pro-capitalist and anti-working class policies carried out by the PSOE (Socialist Workers Party of Spain) government, under the leadership of Felipe Gonzalez, during the previous 14 years.

The bellicose stance of the present government is fully endorsed by the PSOE. But how could it be otherwise--two of its main leaders are directly involved in preparing and conducting the war, with their party's full support.

Javier Solana is NATO Secretary General and Felipe Gonzalez is special envoy for Yugoslavia for both the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Both of them joined the PSOE in 1964. In the early 1980s, while in opposition, they took part in countless demonstrations opposing Spain joining NATO and demanding the removal of American military bases from Spain. Once the PSOE entered government in 1982 they reneged on this stand and five years later ratified Spain's membership of NATO. Today Solana can boast of being the man who "pushed the red button" in the first NATO attack on a sovereign country in its 50 years history.

Izquierda Unida is an amalgam of left, regionalist and radical groups led by the Communist Party, and is the only party strongly opposing the bombing. IU called on the Minister of Defence to order the immediate return

of the Spanish pilots, to whom it appealed to become war objectors. Their opposition to NATO, however, is based on an uncritical defence of Serbian nationalism.

There are big divisions within the United Left. IU federations in Madrid, Asturias and Valencia have criticised the party's support for Milosevic. Julián Fernández, an IU delegate from Navarre, attacked the official stance of the organisation, stating: "NATO's actions can be criticised, but we must make it clear that it is the criminal actions of Milosevic that are responsible for the situation. Now the UN must intervene to provide a civilised solution."

The Basque and Catalan nationalists of the PNV and CiU also support the attacks on Serbia for their own reasons. They use the plight of the Kosovar Albanians to further their own regionalist and separatist aspirations. Jordi Pujol, president of the "Generalitat" (Catalonia's autonomous government), delivered an Easter message, which he called "a sermon rather than a political speech", likening Milosevic to Spain's fascist dictator Franco. He compared the exodus from Kosovo with the plight of the Spanish people in relation to Franco 60 years ago, during the civil war. With one eye on the brewing separatist conflicts in Spain, he declared the tragedy of Kosovo to be a "genocide". This was "because what it is intended to do is destroy a people for the simple fact of being a people, for its language, for its ethnicity, a genocide that goes together with the systematic expulsions and assassinations". Pujol said Catalonia also suffered an attempted genocide--not an ethnic but a cultural one, during General Franco's dictatorship.

Help for the Kosovar Albanians, through military attacks against Serbian positions, was "inevitable" according to Pujol, because "it is a question of respect for people, for their identity, for them to have their own nation, for justice and freedom." For good measure, he added, "It's always been said that if the democratic countries had stopped Hitler in his stride when Austria and Czechoslovakia were annexed, the Second World War would have been avoided."

The Basque nationalists of the PNV were absent from the debate in Congress, but their support for the war and nationalism is well known. At present they are involved in a legal and constitutional wrangle with the government for offering PKK supporters (Kurdish Workers Party) the use of the autonomous Basque

Parliament for their meetings, rallies and congresses.

Regionalist tensions dominate Spanish politics today. The "nation of the autonomies" that was created in 1978 to replace Franco's dictatorship is breaking apart at the seams.

There are 17 different autonomous regions in Spain, with mixed populations from all parts of the country, some of which have already become targets of discrimination. Other regionalist leaders keep an eye on developments in the Basque country and Catalonia to see what advances they can make for themselves.

The cease-fire announced by the ETA (the armed wing of the Basque separatists) in July has not led to a peaceful solution of the Basque question. The Basque nationalists' struggle is conducted under the banner of "self determination", and on this basis they have declared their support for NATO's actions in Yugoslavia, which are being conducted under the guise of "defending Kosovo's right to self determination".



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