

Spain's ex-Socialist Party Prime Minister Gonzalez joins defence of Pinochet

Vicky Short

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Felipe Gonzalez, ex-general secretary of the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE), has come out officially in support of former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. Gonzalez held government office for 14 years between 1982 and 1996.

In an August 28 interview with a Chilean television network, he said that he did not find the situation that Augusto Pinochet faces “reasonable.”

“I am sure that there are more people than you think who share my position”, he added. Gonzalez, who in the past had always declared himself to be anti-Pinochet, said that he did not think this was a strictly judicial case: “I might be wrong judicially, but if Mr. Pinochet's affair is not political, then I have made a mistake choosing my profession.” (Gonzalez was trained as a lawyer).

Pinochet was arrested in London on October 16, 1998 on an extradition warrant from the Spanish judge Baltasar Garzón. The warrant sought to bring charges against Pinochet for the murder and disappearance of more than 3,100 Chileans and foreigners during the military coup in 1973 and the subsequent 17 years of the Pinochet dictatorship. A verdict by British magistrate Ronald Bartle on whether the extradition can be implemented is expected today.

Were Bartle to rule that extradition to Spain can go ahead, it would land the affair in the lap of the Spanish government at an awkward moment, less than six months before a general election. The right-wing government of José María Aznar, which agreed to make the extradition request on behalf of Garzón, would rather not see the ex-dictator on its doorstep.

Several attempts have already been made on the part of both the Chilean and the Spanish governments to find a means to prevent Pinochet being tried in Spain.

Discussions took place between the two governments as early as July over the possibility of Pinochet being tried by international arbitration and Spain's Foreign Minister Abel Matutes attempted to secure the agreement of the PSOE to this end. The government went as far as providing Chile

with documents containing the arguments of Spanish magistrates who had opposed the extradition. When this was reported in the Chilean press, it created such a political and constitutional crisis that the Spanish government was forced to appear before Congress to explain its actions. It then felt obliged to reject Chile's request, on the basis that the matter was subjudice, and that such action would have broken the Spanish law separating the judiciary from the executive branch of state.

The Chilean government then stated that it was preparing to contest the issue of Spain's jurisdiction over a Chilean national in the International Court of Justice, at The Hague. The Spanish government welcomed this proposal. According to the newspaper *El Pais*, it has now instructed their representatives in Britain not to file an appeal against any decision not to extradite Pinochet. If the decision finds for Pinochet he can go back to Chile.

Gonzalez's intervention must be seen in this light. The trial of Pinochet in Spain, especially in the middle of a general election campaign, would provoke discussion on the nature of Spain's own past, particularly its version of the “peaceful transition” from fascism to democracy. Pinochet's lawyers would no doubt seek to utilise comparisons between the two countries to full advantage.

No one is more conscious of the danger this poses than Gonzalez, who played a key role in stabilising the political situation in both countries, in the face of growing opposition to the right-wing dictatorship of the Francoites and the Pinochistas. In his interview he commented, “I carried out the transition in Spain and I would not have liked someone interfering in that process once we had the opportunity to define it ourselves.”

Back in Spain, on September 25, Gonzalez added that the Chilean people had the right to decide their own destiny. In support of Pinochet having been granted a post in the “conciliation government” and immunity for life, Gonzalez declared: “If in 1963 I had been told that Franco would be removed to become senator for life, I would have signed just to have got rid of the old man 13 years before he died.”

Other leading PSOE members played a key role in ensuring that there would be no real reckoning with Pinochet's regime. In an article in *El Pais* on September 27, Jordi Solé Tura, Catalan PSC-PSOE deputy (and an ex-Stalinist), explained that months before the 1988 referendum in Chile he was invited to give lectures and meet with representative of all the opposition parties. The basic theme of his discussion was whether lessons could be learned from the political transition from dictatorship in Spain. "However many similarities there were between the two processes, there were also basic differences", he told his audience. "The first one being that we had initiated and completed the transition with Franco dead and they would have to initiate and pilot theirs with their Franco alive. The second one was that in Spain 40 years had elapsed since the civil war and in Chile the military coup which had ended democracy was still very recent."

"In Spain," he continued, "new generations had grown, the memories of our terrifying war were still alive but further from the day to day life. The armed forces were still a remnant of Francoism, but were no longer in a position to impose a military regime, and we were in a new Europe which was licking its terrible wounds, but which was on the road to a new project of peace, unity and prosperity. In Chile, however, the memories were immediate; the wounds were not yet healed; the armed forces were still a fundamental factor in the political life. And in the Latin-American continent the pressure of the United States to feed a cold war, which did not admit any openings and put everything it disliked in the box of 'international communism', still persisted."

Gonzalez, Solé and others are afraid that a full-blown trial of Pinochet in Spain would also reawaken bitter memories in the Spanish people and raise questions over just what type of class compromise PSOE, in collaboration with the Communist Party, engineered in 1975.

During the 36 years of Franco's rule—1939 to 1975—over 1 million Spaniards lost their lives at the hands of his dictatorial regime. Following the death of Franco in 1975 and the collapse of his regime, the PSOE did everything in its power to prevent working people from settling accounts with the fascist butchers. Instead, they adopted the Spanish Communist Party slogan of "forget and forgive".

The "peaceful transition" gave complete political amnesty to the fascists. Most of them—including the generals, chiefs of police and civil guards, as well as heads of industry, banking and commerce—remained in their posts. Only the most obviously undemocratic laws were abolished, such as the death penalty, the ban on abortion and religious fascist education. Referendums would be allowed, universal suffrage was brought back and a degree of Catalan and

Basque autonomy recognised. The new constitution guaranteed the separation of judicial and executive powers. But property remained in the hands of its previous owners and, apart from one or two show trials which put under house arrest a tiny number of the most prominent fascists, no one was tried or punished for genocide, torture or trampling on human and democratic rights. The Franco national flag was adopted by the new government, as was the national anthem.

To become more acceptable to the fascists and the military, the PSOE shed all traces of its supposedly socialist past. Gonzalez, who came from the "Catholic left", personified the ideological change the party effected around 1978/79. Following the PSOE 18th Congress, he even briefly resigned in protest at the refusal of the majority of delegates to endorse his call to drop the "Marxist" label applied to the party's ideology. By then he had become a popular figure promoted by the media and political milieu as the young, charismatic, modern leader who could replace the then right-wing government of Adolfo Suarez.

Four months later an extraordinary congress was held which decided not to define the PSOE as Marxist, but to note instead that Marxism is only one of the many contributory ideologies of the party. The PSOE, with Felipe Gonzalez as its general secretary, finally came to power in Spain in 1982.

That Gonzalez has openly joined the likes of former British Conservative Party Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a campaign to free Pinochet has embarrassed the present leaders of the PSOE. Its general secretary Joaquin Almunia declared that Gonzalez's opinions were not those of the party. However Manuel Chavez, the Andalusian regional general secretary of the PSOE, qualified this by stating that the party could not "act like an ostrich" and ignore the fact that Pinochet "could muddy relations between the two sovereign states" and damage the Chilean "transition". Other leaders of the PSOE made similar statements.



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