

Spanish government honours Franco's fascists

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Spain's right-wing Popular Party government has recently posthumously decorated one of Franco's torturers, compensated the family of a high-ranking officer from the time of Franco's military dictatorship, and is considering awarding posthumous medals to other fascists.

A law passed over a year ago, applies to all victims of "terrorist organisations", in particular the Basque separatist ETA (Euzkadi Ta Azkatasuna—Basque Fatherland and Liberty). The law created a new "Grand Cross" medal, to be bestowed on the victims of terror, as designated under the "Royal Order of Civil Recognition of the Victims of Terrorism".

The man who has been posthumously honoured with the Grand Cross, and therefore rehabilitated under this law, is Melitón Manzanas, who was the first victim of organised killings by ETA back in 1968.

Manzanas started public activity in the youth movement of Acción Popular. He was a militant in Franco's party during the civil war of 1936 to 1939. In 1938 he joined the Police Corps in Irún—a town in the North of Spain bordering with France. At the time of the Nazi occupation of the South of France under the Vichy government, he closely collaborated with the Gestapo, hounding those Jews fleeing Nazi persecution through Irún into Spain. In his capacity as policeman he jailed and tortured anyone who opposed the Franco dictatorship.

Manzanas was later made chief of the Socio-Political Brigade in San Sebastián (Guipúzcoa) and became the principal figure of the Franco regime's repression in the Basque Country, which he continued until his death at the hands of ETA in 1968.

Financial compensation has also been approved for the family of the infamous Admiral Luis Carrero Blanco, whose car was blown up by a massive bomb planted by ETA in the centre of Madrid on December 20, 1973. ETA's assassination of Carrero Blanco was

popularly hailed at the time and even claimed as the event that ushered in the end of the dictatorship.

In 1972, at the age of 80, Franco had ceded the Presidency of the Government to Carrero Blanco, keeping for himself the leadership of the State. Franco saw in Carrero Blanco a loyal henchman who could be trusted to leave the actual structures of power unchanged. However, there were rumours that Carrero had been betrayed by sections of the Franco regime—who saw in him an impediment for the smooth transition from dictatorship to bourgeois democracy. It was thought that more than one blind eye had been turned to ETA's plans to blow him up.

The legislation used to rehabilitate elements within the Franco regime was drawn up during ETA's now abandoned cease-fire, and was approved unanimously by the Spanish Senate and Congress at the end of 1999. The law sets out the conditions for qualifying for compensation and amounts to be paid to victims of terrorism or their descendants. By June last year 2,275 applications for compensation had been filed, of which 961 had been resolved and 20 rejected. By the same date the Ministry of the Presidency, responsible for awarding the Grand Cross, had received 526 applications and bestowed 203. Of these 166 were given to victims of ETA, including Melitón Manzanas, 14 to victims of the Antifascist Resistance Group (GRAPO, a small Maoist urban terrorist group associated with the Communist Party-Reconstructed) and 17 to victims of the Anti-terrorist Liberation Groups (GAL - set up by the Socialist government in the early 80's in a dirty war to liquidate ETA).

The Law of the Victims, as it is popularly known, set January 1, 1968 as the date from which victims of terrorism would have the right to be compensated and decorated, but it was not until now that the government felt able to include two fascists among the beneficiaries.

Amnesty International issued a press release on January 30 condemning the award to Manzanas and Blanco as a “clear message that violations of human rights will not be punished in any effective manner in Spain”. The human rights organisation said this was reinforced by the fact that those responsible for the “dirty war” against ETA in the 1980s were still not being prosecuted.

Amnesty's remarks followed the pardon of 11 National Police agents and three members of the Civil Guards, jailed for torturing ETA members and other prisoners. Their sentence was reduced by two thirds, which meant they walked free.

The Socialist and Communist parties, the Stalinist-led electoral bloc Izquierda Unida and the trade unions have demanded that the government reverse its decision to decorate and compensate the two fascists. But these same parties are directly responsible for the political climate in which the right wing feels able to rehabilitate its own. The so-called “peaceful transition” from fascism to democracy of the late 1970s exonerated the fascists for the horrendous crimes committed against the Spanish people during the civil war and revolution, as well as the following 36 years of dictatorship. Under the motto “Forget and Forgive” the Communist Party, one of the principal mediators of the transition, endorsed this political amnesty for the fascists.

Today the Communist Party unites behind the right wing, the employers, church, army, police and intelligence forces in “the common fight against terrorism” and the war against ETA.

There is no doubt that ETA's perspective is inimical to the interests of the working class. The goal of independence for the small area in the North of Spain and South of France would not benefit the Basque workers but would simply transfer their exploitation from the national to the regional bourgeoisie and create divisions within the Spanish working class. Moreover ETA's indiscriminate bombings only alienates and confuses working people, both Basque and non-Basque, and plays into the hands of the repressive forces within Spain.

But the Communist and Socialist Party's anti-ETA campaign does not offer a way forward for the working class. Rather, opposition to terrorism is the basis on which the two parties seek to justify and cement their alliance with the ruling class, the state and its political

representatives. The Socialist Party has just signed a pact with the Popular Party of Unity against Terrorism that declares, among other things, that, “terrorism is a problem of the State.” It adds that, “The only democratic deficit that exists in the Basque society is ... terrorist violence”. Therefore, “The defence of human rights and public freedoms concerns in the first place the joint Security forces and bodies of the State...the eradication of violence in the Basque Country and in the rest of Spain depends on their efficiency.”

The Comisiones Obreras (CC.OO.), linked to the Communist Party, and the Union General de Trabajadores (UGT), linked to the Socialist Party, issued a manifesto on December 8, 2000 under the title: “Against The Franco Regime Before, Against Terrorism Now!” In it they pledge to fight side by side with the government against terrorism and to suppress social demands:

“We cannot, we must not give in to blackmail, or become accustomed to a routine of bombings and guns. No social or political organisation committed to democracy can legitimately wage war on its own account. It is urgent that we find a scenario for dialogue and unity for the forces of democracy, completely divorced from any party-based ambitions and capable of generating confidence in the strength of the democratic system and in the effectiveness of law enforcement in all corners of society and amongst all its people. CC.OO. shall devote its best efforts to this over the coming days.”

“Those of us who fought against the Franco regime during the dictatorship shall fight now against terrorism in [sic] democracy”, stated CC.OO.'s General Secretary, José María Fidalgo.



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