

Spanish government beats the drums of war

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In Spain, the September 11 terrorist attacks have provided a green light for the governing People's Party (PP) to press ahead with its right wing agenda in foreign and domestic affairs.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Prime Minister José María Aznar pledged his unconditional support for any military action the US government deemed necessary in its "war against terror". The Spanish cabinet sent the US a list of military assets that it was prepared to commit to the US war-drive if needed—including bases, aeroplanes, ships and men.

The PP hopes to use the "war against terrorism" to deal ruthlessly with the Basque separatist group ETA. Aznar claims that his policy of seeking to defeat the separatists militarily has been vindicated. In a television interview he said that terrorism was "the main enemy of the world," adding "some of us have been saying this for a long time. Today, dramatically, everybody accepts it". Another government minister warned ETA that it should be "very worried", as the fight against terrorism was now "the first item on the working agenda of the free nations".

Aznar has hurriedly prepared a draft law that he is seeking to rush through parliament, reforming the national surveillance organisation CESID. Under the draft law, CESID will become the CNI (National Intelligence Centre) and will be empowered to open postal and electronic mail, tap telephones and enter homes without needing to first obtain permission from a judge.

CNI's functions will be separated from the Ministry of Defence and independent of the police and the Civil Guards, under whose authority CESID previously worked. Secret services director Jorge Dezcallar will be directly answerable to the Prime Minister. The government is also introducing legislation to enable the freezing of ETA's finances.

New measures are also being implemented against

immigrants. The police central office has set in motion a special mechanism code named "Operación Café", whose objective is the pursuit and control of Colombian and Ecuadorian citizens living in Spain. The operation is to survey leisure and recreation areas frequented by people of these nationalities, in order to carry out "selective identifications".

In the last few days, police have also detained at least 16 people of Algerian nationality. It is alleged that six of them have some connection with Algerian terrorist organisations. The other 10 are to be released and deported. One of their "crimes" was to have sent 5.5 million pesetas (\$29,000) worth of blankets to Chechnya.

Extra Civil Guards are being sent to Spain's African territories of Ceuta and Melilla to reinforce the already fortified borders with Morocco.

Aznar, whose political origins lie in Franco's fascist falange, clearly feels emboldened by the militaristic and oppressive climate being whipped up internationally, and views himself as the ideal man for imposing the type of measures that flow from it.

His domestic agenda is based on a ruthless drive to wipe out most of the remaining welfare benefits and working conditions that Spanish workers won after the collapse of the fascist regime following Franco's death in 1975. He is set to impose new labour reforms that will tear up the tripartite pact between government, unions and employers, which has served to contain class conflicts over the last 20 years.

The PP government also sees this conjuncture as being favourable to enhance Spain's weight within the European Union.

On January 1, 2002, Spain takes up the EU presidency for six months, and hopes to use its position to achieve a European consensus for the final annihilation of ETA. Under Spanish pressure, the EU is negotiating the establishment of a "European space of

security, freedom and justice” in which no country would be allowed to provide political asylum for dissidents from other EU states and are expected to return any so-called terrorists to their country of origin on demand.

Aznar has won the full support of the Socialist Party (PSOE) for his bellicose stance. The PSOE feels that recent events have vindicated the dirty war it pursued against ETA, involving assassinations and persecutions, whilst in government during the 1980s. It has agreed that Aznar will not have to consult parliament before his government takes any action of war deemed necessary, just to be “kept informed”—particularly if Spanish soldiers are sent to join the US campaign. Aznar is not due to provide his first account to parliament until next week. The PSOE has also presented its own proposals for increased airport security. These include transferring responsibility for security from private firms to a new special corps to be created out of the notorious Civil Guards, long a hotbed of right wing sentiment.

Within Spain there is no great support for war. Demonstrations against the attacks on Afghanistan have been taking place in the main towns throughout the country. Public opinion polls in *El Pais* and other newspapers are already recording a majority—two to one—opposed to the war and Spain’s involvement in it. At the same time, Aznar’s attacks on working conditions and welfare have met an angry response. University students and teachers have announced a series of protests culminating in a national strike in the next few weeks against university reforms. Primary and secondary education workers are also preparing to take action against the destruction of their working conditions. Other workers in the airways and auto industries have threatened industrial action against the destruction of thousands of jobs.



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