

Split in Spanish Socialist Party

Vicky Short
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After weeks of wrangling, accusations and counteraccusations, the Assembly of the Community of Madrid, the autonomous Madrid government, agreed to establish a commission to investigate the circumstances surrounding the desertion of two Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) candidates from the vital investiture vote ceremony, which prevented their party from attaining the presidency. This was provisionally taken by default by the ruling People's Party (PP).

Eduardo Tamayo and María Teresa Sáez, who were elected on May 25 as PSOE candidates to the Madrid autonomous government, left the meeting on June 10 that would have elected a president and therefore the party in power. At the crucial moment of voting they were taken by car and remained hidden for a few days in a hotel, allegedly booked for them by two businessmen, Francisco Vazquez and Francisco Bravo, whose company, Euroholding, is involved in real estate and land speculation and who have very close ties with the PP. Many shareholders of Euroholding's are members of the PP, including Vazquez. The PSOE accuses the PP of being behind the manoeuvres in collusion with the absconders, with the aim of keeping Madrid, one of the most profitable land development areas of Spain, in the hands of the PP.

At a second attempt, the socialist candidate, Rafael Simancas, again lost the vote due to the abstention of the two socialist candidates. The Assembly is now more or less at a standstill. The PSOE has been demanding that the Assembly withdraw the credentials of the two and that they be replaced by two other socialists. The PP will have no truck with this proposal and is doing everything possible to make a second election, which they hope to win, inevitable. If the two elected candidates do not give up their credentials before August 28, which is highly unlikely, acting president Alberto Ruiz Gallardon will be required to dissolve the Assembly and call new elections 55 days

later.

The action of the two socialist candidates is one expression of the ongoing disintegration of the PSOE.

The Madrid Socialist Federation is known to be divided between four factions: Renovadores, Renovadores De Base, Guerristas and Izquierda Socialista (Renovators, Renovators from below, Guerrists—supporters of Alfonso Guerra—and the Socialist Left). The PSOE candidate for president of the Madrid Assembly, Rafael Simancas, is a “Guerrista,” whom the renegades accuse of trying to push the Assembly to the “extreme left” through its agreement with the Izquierda Unida (United Left), an umbrella organisation led by the Communist Party

On July 9 the expelled renegade, Eduardo Tamayo, announced the birth of a new party, Nuevo Socialismo (New Socialism). He stated that he and his co-deserter will run for the new election under its banner.

No details were given of how, when, where, by whom and on what political programme the party was formed, but Tamayo declared that the electoral list of the new party will include 111 deputies “of recognised prestige, professional and personal”. He also said that he has already secured the support of five deputies from the socialist group of the Madrid Assembly itself. Tamayo added that the new party will be social democratic in character and that it will be financed with “my savings and those of the militants.” The two deserters have voted with the PP on certain issues.

The PP is experiencing its own problems. It has already been obliged to expel one of its own members for his involvement in the Madrid scandal, the general manager of the autonomous state-run “Madrid Excelente,” Fernando Bastarache. He was discovered to be lying to the media in relation to his relations with the two industrialists Bravo and Vazquez. Other expulsions are in the pipeline.

The debates at the Madrid Assembly resemble a bar-

room brawl. The frustrated PSOE candidate Rafael Simancas demanded a commission to investigate the truth behind the “plot which has brought us to this situation” and implied that the PP was undermining democracy and assisting speculation and “town planning delinquency”. The PP provisional president, Esperanza Aguirre, described Simancas as a “disciple of Goebbels, Hitler’s propaganda minister, author of the vilest phrase in political history: a lie repeated a thousand times becomes an unquestionable truth.” She accused Simancas of having signed an agreement with a group of town-planners to construct 50,000 houses during the election campaign

The vitriol spilled over into the debate at Congress between the leader of the PSOE, Rodriguez Zapatero, and Jose Maria Aznar, the prime minister, who said that divisions and splits similar to those in Madrid were taking place in the PSOE in the rest of the country. The coordinator of United Left joined in the melee. Gaspar Llamazares, accused Aznar of “seriously undermining democracy,” adding that the PP government has been a government of social inequality, division, political confrontation and democratic deficit.

He made comments pointing to the fear of many in the political elite that the Aznar government’s actions are threatening the consensus established after the transition from fascism to bourgeois democracy. Llamazares stated that the PP government “has not had any sense of shame in breaking the delicate consensus built up during the transition,” such as the agreement on the State model, the anti-terrorist struggle, foreign policy and the will to embrace “pluralism”.

In and out of government the Socialist Party, with the aid of the Communist Party and the trade unions, has insisted that workers do not rock the boat or democracy would be imperilled.

The tense and confrontational atmosphere inside the Madrid Assembly and the Congress is exposing the political putrefaction of all the supposedly democratic institutions, parties and individuals. The right-wing trajectory of the Aznar government and the impotence and unwillingness of the PSOE to put forward any clear alternative in defence of the interests of working people are wracking Spain’s body politic. All the unresolved issues of the civil war and its aftermath, so carefully suppressed since the death of Franco, are being discussed and answers demanded.

In a July 20 *Pais* editorial entitled “Quagmire,” the paper voices its fears:

“The political climate that Spain is living through, a mere few months from the general elections, cannot be more worrying. Spain’s participation in the Iraq war—fundamentally political and diplomatic during the invasion and now openly military in the occupation—is leaving a trail of clashes and resentments, the most prominent of which is the antagonism marked by the personal will of José María Aznar. Debating ideas, contrasting options and programmes is something totally absent in the present Spanish political life. Never before has such a high degree of animosity and contempt for the opposition been reached on the part of the presidency of the government. Anything goes in this game, even the unscrupulous distorting of the words of their opponents, as Aznar himself and some of his ministers do regarding the autonomous proposals of the PSOE and the PSC [Catalan Socialist Party].”

Referring to the Madrid conflict, the paper says that Zapatero (general secretary of the PSOE) lacked reflexes and decisiveness and now lags behind a wasted government with both sides incapable of solving the crisis that is feeding mistrust between governors and governed. It accuses Aznar of ignoring parliament as if he were above the law and beyond any control. Aznar has also refused to answer questions on the lies about the Iraq war and gone behind the back of parliament to send troops to the country.

Adding uncertainty to this situation is the fact that Aznar will not present himself as candidate at the general elections in March 2004. No one has been selected to replace him, and he has stated that he will remain general secretary of the PP until 2005, when his term ends.



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