

Spain: Aznar government faces crisis over Iraqi WMD

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The right-wing Popular Party (PP) government of José María Aznar in Spain is facing increasing criticism over its use of the claim that Iraq posed a military “threat” with its “weapons of mass destruction” as a pretext for supporting the US-led pre-emptive attack on Iraq.

Aznar already faced intense opposition to his policy, with opinion polls registering 98 percent of Spanish people against the war. Feelings ran so strong that Aznar, while pledging his full political support for the action, had to hold back on sending combat troops to Iraq, limiting Spain’s contribution to logistical support.

A report in *El País*, on August 11, said that the government had told its advisers and the military what line to pursue in the pre-war debate over whether or not Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. The Spanish government sought to block any independent assessment into Iraq’s weapons capability, the report said. Instead a document was sent by the Defence Ministry to the armed forces Chiefs of the General Staff in February, which simply asserted that “Saddam has weapons of mass destruction” that pose a “threat to Spain.”

Claiming that the document reads like a Popular Party internal memorandum, *El País* comments, “The Chiefs of the General Staff, however, are not a political body. Instead, they are described by law as an ‘an organ of military assessment to the prime minister and the Defence Ministry.’ Their role is therefore to advise the government, and not be advised by it on what to say. The document affirms without question the threat Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction supposedly posed, and even lists quantities of chemical and biological agents as well as materials that Saddam Hussein’s regime could use to make nuclear arms. It is the same argument Prime Minister José María Aznar used in his

February 5 address to Congress, and the same as that used by the United States and Britain in support of going to war. None of these governments have since been able to support the claims with hard evidence.”

In his February speech, Aznar said, “Let me detail for you some of the examples provided by the UN inspectors report’s, concerning the nuclear arms programme. In recent years Iraq has repeatedly attempted to acquire high-quality aluminium tubing able to enrich uranium. It has also sought to illegally acquire stocks of that material.” In a television interview the same month, Aznar said, “You can be sure that I am telling you the truth. The Iraqi regime has weapons of mass destruction.”

The Spanish government was, if possible, even more blatant than the US and Britain in its eagerness to see the occupation of Iraq. On March 7, at a United Nations Security Council meeting, the Spanish foreign minister Ana Palacio stated: “The progress being made by the [UN weapons] inspectors is making us deviate from the objective. The disarmament of Saddam Hussein’s regime.”

In his speech to Congress, Aznar claimed that the information he cited regarding Iraq’s nuclear arms programme had come from the United Nations through the UN weapons inspectors, rather than from the US and British governments. In a move unhelpful to British prime minister Tony Blair, the White House recently admitted that the issue of Niger supplying Iraq with enriched uranium should not have been included in President Bush’s January 28 State of the Union address. The information, attributed to British intelligence, has since been proved to be based upon forged documents. The Spanish CNI intelligence service had itself ruled out that Baghdad had the capability to build nuclear weapons.

El País has initiated a campaign for an inquiry over the issue, stating in its June 23 issue that the government had distorted intelligence on weapons of mass destruction in the lead-up to the war. This was followed by a demand from the leader of the Socialist Party (PSOE), José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, for a parliamentary committee meeting to clarify whether the prime minister had misrepresented the intelligence he had.

Such demands express the growing concerns within sections of the ruling elite over Aznar's support for the ongoing occupation of Iraq. On July 22, *El País* carried an editorial titled "In search of a mandate" that said the following:

"This week, Spanish troops will begin heading for Iraq. They do so without a United Nations mandate, and they will be under the command of the occupying forces there. This is not a peace operation, but one of occupation and the maintenance of order. Resolution 1483, adopted unanimously on May 22 by the Security Council, limited itself to 'taking note' of a letter drafted by the United States and the United Kingdom that referred to their presence in Iraq as 'occupying powers under a unified command,' and recognising their 'authority, responsibility, and obligations.' But the resolution did not legitimise the invasion after the event. Nor did it give any mandate to the occupying troops, nor those 'other states that are not occupying powers, but are carrying out tasks, or that might do so at some future time,' as is the case with the Spanish troops."

The paper argues that the difficulties the US faces in Iraq necessitate international support and that this holds out the possibility of fixing the rift between the US and Europe. "Post-war Iraq could be an opportunity to improve relations with Europe if the Bush administration agreed to seek the help of the United Nations, thus reinforcing its role," the paper says.

Citing the efforts of Russia, Germany, France and Chile to line up behind a new UN resolution that they hope will "reinvest the UN with some authority," the editorial says that "the Spanish government has missed an excellent opportunity to show international leadership by heading this movement, particularly in light of its two-year rotating presidency of the Security Council."

While *El País* sees the alliance with Bush as a

destabilising factor in Spanish politics, Aznar sees it as integral to the central thrust of his government's policies. The PP has sought to use the so-called "war against terrorism" to massively intensify the attacks upon democratic rights in Spain. Utilising the terrorist bombings of the Basque separatist ETA, the PP's support for the war against Iraq has been accompanied by the proscribing of political organisations, the banning of demonstrations and the shutting down of newspapers at home.

This is intimately related to another reason for Aznar's support for the war, which is a basic agreement with the economic policies being pursued by the Bush administration. The PP government has been in the forefront of the introduction of so-called American business methods and the mass layoffs, speed-ups and wage cuts they imply.

Working people throughout Spain turned out in their millions to make their opposition to the war and the PP government known, but what was lacking was an alternative political perspective.

The first step in developing a viable movement against imperialism and war is to reject the efforts to hold up the UN and the European bourgeoisie as a more democratic alternative to the US. Though a majority of European governments opposed military action without UN backing, they did not do so from any principled standpoint and have subsequently gone out of their way to appease the US. Moreover, to the extent that the UN is allowed to play any role in Iraq, it will only be to police the Iraqi people on behalf of the major imperialist powers.

The renewed turn to imperialist colonialism abroad, coupled with the abrogation of democratic rights at home, can only be defeated by an independent movement of the working class, through the building of a genuine socialist and internationalist party.



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