

# Terrorist atrocity in Madrid kills at least 192 people

**WSWS Editorial Board****12 March 2004**

The bombings that killed at least 192 people in Madrid on Thursday are criminal acts for which there is no possible justification.

Coordinated blasts at the Atocha rail station in the center of the Spanish capital and two smaller stations also injured at least 1,400 people. Hospitals were overwhelmed with casualties. Buses were used as makeshift facilities, and hundreds of Spaniards queued to give blood.

The blasts—ten in all, according to Spanish government authorities—occurred at the height of the morning rush hour, at approximately 7:30 a.m. local time.

Atocha is a huge rail station used by commuter and inter-city trains, which also has a metro station. It was hit by three bombs at a time of peak travel. The bombs destroyed a train that was pulling into the station, with many young students and workers on board. There were also four blasts in a street outside. The two smaller stations targeted were El Pozo and Santa Eugenia.

The devastation and loss of life could have been even worse. Police bomb squads carried out controlled explosions on a number of other devices that were hidden in backpacks.

There was no advance warning of the attacks.

Coming as they do before Sunday's general election, the outrages will give strength to the right-wing government of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and the candidates of his ruling People's Party.

Spain's political parties immediately suspended campaigning and the government declared three days of mourning for the victims and called for rallies to be held to condemn the attacks.

Aznar was one of the staunchest supporters of the US-led invasion of Iraq, despite the overwhelming

opposition of the Spanish people to the war. The slaughter of innocent Spaniards will therefore create the maximum possible confusion and lend false legitimacy to the so-called “war on terror” which Aznar claims to be waging, in alliance with the US and Britain. It will be used to impose new attacks on democratic rights in Spain.

Aznar immediately responded to the bombings by proclaiming that Spain would not bend in the face of terrorism. He pledged that the “mass murderers” would be totally defeated.

Though no group has admitted responsibility, the government immediately blamed the Basque separatist group ETA. Aznar's interior minister, Angel Acebes, insisted there was no doubt the nationalist group was responsible. He declared, “ETA had been looking for a massacre in Spain. Unfortunately, today it achieved its goal.”

The People's Party candidate for prime minister in Sunday's election, Mariano Rajoy, who is, according to polls, expected to succeed Aznar, also declared that ETA was to blame. He was supported by Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero of the opposition Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE), who called ETA a “criminal organization.”

The government pointed out that last month two suspected ETA members were arrested as they headed to Madrid in a truck containing explosives. Last December, Spanish authorities said they foiled an ETA operation to blow up a train at a Madrid rail station, arresting two men and intercepting two bombs.

It is, however, by no means certain that ETA is responsible. Its bombings have never before been on this scale. Last year, for example, only three people died in ETA attacks—the lowest figure for 30 years.

Some commentators have raised the possibility that

Aznar's support for the Iraq war could have made Spain the target for groups linked to Al Qaeda.

This was the stand taken by Arnald Otegi, the leader of the banned Basque separatist party Batasuna, the political wing of ETA. He denied that ETA could have been responsible and suggested that the bombings were the work of the "Arab resistance."

By yesterday evening, Spanish government officials appeared to be backing off from their original insistence that the ETA was unquestionably the author of the atrocities. The Spanish interior minister reported that a van containing detonators and an audiotape of Koranic verses had been found near the scene of one of the bombings.

The Arabic-language newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi* in London announced that it had received a letter that purportedly came from the "Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades," part of the Al Qaeda network, claiming responsibility for the bombings.

A US official cautioned it was "still too early to say" whether the blasts were carried out by ETA or other terror groups, including Al Qaeda.

It cannot be ruled out that Spanish state forces or rightists linked to the government were involved in the bombings. It would not be the first time that such provocations have been staged in order to cement the grip of an unpopular regime.

One notable example is the CIA-authored Operation "Gladio," which involved a series of bomb outrages in Italy in the 1970s. These terrorist crimes were carried out to counter the growing influence of the Italian Communist Party and shift politics to the right, as part of a "strategy of tension." The Italicus train near Bologna was targeted in 1974, and in 1980 a bomb was exploded in the Bologna station's waiting room, killing 85 people.

Whoever carried out the bombings, however, the effect is the same. Such is the reactionary role played by terrorism that it is difficult to know where bankrupt politics ends and state provocation begins.

The resort to indiscriminate terror attacks aimed at the maximum destruction of human life is the hallmark of groupings deeply hostile to the interests of the working class. There is an intimate connection between the methods employed by terrorist organizations and the nationalist or religio-communalist politics upon which they are based.

The conflicts with imperialist governments of such organizations—whether secularist like ETA or Islamic fundamentalist like Al Qaeda—are not motivated by the progressive struggle for the political, social and economic unification and emancipation of the world's peoples. Both ETA and Al Qaeda are the representatives of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois forces that seek only a more favorable accommodation with the imperialist powers—one that would enable them to share in the fruits of the exploitation of the workers and oppressed masses.

This reactionary orientation underlies their callous indifference to the fate of the workers and young people who are the target of their outrages, whether in Spain, the United States or elsewhere.

The belief that such random acts of brutality and violence will compel the ruling class to reach an accommodation has been the hallmark of every terror campaign for decades past. Nothing progressive can possibly emerge from such a criminal political perspective. Instead, terrorism plays directly into the hands of the most right-wing warmongers within the ruling elite.

The Madrid bombings will only give succor not just to Aznar, but to the Bush administration in the US and the Blair government in Britain. They must be condemned unreservedly.



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