

German reactions to Aznar defeat: *Die Zeit* insults Spanish voters

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The Spanish parliamentary election, which took place in the aftermath of the devastating bombings in Madrid, has met with ferocious reactions in all the European capitals. The election defeat of the conservative Aznar government shook the governments in London, Rome and Warsaw, which lost an important ally in the axis of those willing to wage war. Moreover, in Paris and Berlin, where the Iraq war was viewed more critically, the result unleashed a shock.

Something had happened that deeply worries the official parties, both left and right. The Spanish people had used their vote to thwart the electoral manipulations of the ruling elite. Hitherto, politicians and party researchers took it for granted that a substantial terrorist attack, like a military attack by a hostile power, would unite the great majority of the population around national symbols, would subdue domestic contradictions at least temporarily, and strengthen the conservative forces of the state.

On this basis, terrorist attacks have been used by many governments to foment fear and nationalist tendencies, while at the same time limiting democratic rights.

The Sharon government in Israel could not cling to power a day longer without its state terrorism provoking new suicide attacks. The brutal murder of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin just a few days ago underscores this. The Bush administration used the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, to legitimise its illegal war against Iraq. Vladimir Putin came to power four years ago after bombs destroyed Moscow apartment blocks, killing more than 300 and leaving the population in fear. Two journalists who endeavoured to uncover the background to these attacks have since died under mysterious circumstances.

Likewise, the Aznar government immediately tried to exploit the attacks in Madrid for its own advantage. The prime minister personally made phone calls, telling journalists that the Basque nationalist ETA was responsible. But then the Spanish electorate used the ballot to show that the population cannot be manipulated ad infinitum, as many political cynics believe. Even under conditions of shock and mourning, the great majority reacted politically, holding the

government's war policy responsible for the terrorist attacks.

The Spanish election revealed the beginnings of something that will become increasingly important in coming political developments: the politically independent activity by broad masses of the population.

This is exactly what has frightened all governments.

And it is why, immediately following the elections, an intensive media campaign began, aimed at reinterpreting the events. Particularly in Germany, where any independent grassroots political movement is regarded with great suspicion, the media went into top gear. Commentators of every type, who not infrequently have been prepared to criticise the American media and their subservience to the Bush administration, made clear that when it comes down to it they can be just as conformist as their American colleagues.

The campaign was spearheaded by the publication that likes to call itself the flagship of the German media—the weekly *Die Zeit*. Under the headline, “Appeasement is no answer to the offensive of Islamic fascism: Spaniards are drawing the wrong lessons from the Madrid attacks,” editor Josef Joffe published an inflammatory article aimed at the Spanish electorate.

Of course, it is known that Joffe supports—very one-sidedly—the American and Israeli points of view on all questions, and that his passion to provoke is not shared by everyone working at *Die Zeit*. However, together with former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt (Social Democratic Party), he is one of the newsweekly's publishers.

Along the lines of the motto “Start the piece with the greatest lie!” Joffe begins with the statement “In Spain, terrorism has won an election for the first time,” thereby making the majority of Spanish voters accomplices of the terrorists. Then comes the following evaluation: “Up to now, when faced with terrorism, every Western democracy has moved to support its leadership—whether in England, America, Italy or Israel. Not, however, in Spain, where international terrorism can feel doubly pleased: It not only

blew up a pillar of the anti-terrorism alliance, but also achieved a dream psychological victory by striking a powerful blow for appeasement. This triumph will not reduce the terror, but will bring about further attacks.”

How many idiocies is it possible to pack into a single sentence? If the majority of Spaniards had voted for the conservative People’s Party of Aznar, then, according to Joffe, “Democracy” (i.e., “the people”) would have moved to support “its leadership.” Why? Over the previous year, hundreds of thousands, sometimes even several millions, of Spanish people have demonstrated on a number of occasions against the policies and social cuts carried out by this government. There can be no talk of a leadership, in the sense of one that represents the interests of the masses. Had there been a serious alternative to Aznar and his Partido Popular, this government would have been voted out much sooner.

The election of the PSOE (Socialist Party) is certainly not a vote of confidence in the socialists. Right to the last minute, many Spanish people rejected the social democrats. They have not forgotten the role of the Gonzales government and its numerous corruption scandals, which finally helped Aznar to power, let alone the role of all the other social democratic governments in Europe. On the same day as the Spanish election, social democrats in the Austrian state of Corinthia agreed to form a coalition government with the right-wing extremist Jörg Haider.

The Spanish election was a plebiscite against a hated government, which in the absence of any serious representation of the interests of the general population took the form of a vote for the PSOE.

The second stupidity of Joffe is his contention that “international terrorism” has been strengthened by the result of the election; not only has it “blown apart the anti-terror alliance,” but it has also “struck a powerful blow in favour of appeasement.” Here, Joffe adopts word-for-word the demagoguery of the Bush administration, which justifies the Iraq war and the illegal occupation and plundering of the raw materials of that country in the name of the “fight against terrorism.”

In fact, the source of terror lies in the reactionary politics of the US, which takes upon itself the right to bomb and terrorise any country, when this corresponds to Washington’s geo-strategic or political goals and interests. Even during the darkest years under Saddam Hussein, things were not as bad for the Iraqi population as they are after one year of war and US occupation.

The significance of the Spanish election lies in the fact that a majority of the population recognised that those ultimately responsible for the brutal bombings in Madrid sit in the Pentagon and in the White House, and are supported by their

cowardly henchmen in London, Rome, Warsaw and Madrid. Moreover, the election result demonstrates that the European population is quite capable of confronting the US war policy and of reaching out a hand to the American working class in the fight against the Bush administration.

Joffe, noticing that his banal war propaganda is losing ground, introduces yet another argument. He states, “The Europeans find it hard to look into the mirror of Islamic fascism and see therein the visage of their own history.” But this argument stands reality completely on its head. Precisely because the European population in several countries—including Spain—has suffered firsthand from fascist dictatorships and war, is it so hostile to the Bush administration and its aggressive war politics.

A president who was not elected, but who seized power with the help of the highest court; who regarded the attacks of September 11, 2001, as a welcome pretext for implementing long-prepared war plans; who ruthlessly swept aside all international organisations and international law to conduct an illegal war of aggression; who locks up prisoners in cages like animals and denies them their elementary human rights; who has abolished fundamental democratic rights for his own citizens and is developing authoritarian structures of rule—all this is very well known in Europe from the time of Mussolini, Hitler and Franco.

Moreover, several American governments, and in particular the Bush family, have for some time enjoyed close relations with the bin Laden family and originally provided bin Laden’s conspiratorial Islamic organisation with substantial support. As long as the terrorist attacks were directed against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan or elsewhere, they were encouraged by the US, supported by the CIA logistically, and provided with modern weapons and finances.

In addition, it would be advisable for Josef Joffe to take a closer look at those he argues are defenders of democracy and liberty. José Marie Aznar, whose father was a finance official under Franco, includes as members in his Partido Popular quite a number of former members and cadres of the old fascist regime, while Silvio Berlusconi, who waves the flag for the American president in neighbouring Italy, embodies the most criminal element of European politics, in a coalition with the neo-fascists of the National Alliance.



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