

Spain's Popular Party seeks to destabilise PSOE government

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The Popular Party (PP) has released a propaganda film entitled *After the Massacre*, which denounces the election victory of the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) on March 14, 2004 as an act of “anti-democratic coercion” by the “left” and “anti-establishment” organisations. Such public attacks on the outcome of parliamentary elections have not been heard in Spain since army officers stormed parliament in an attempted military coup on February 23, 1981.

The release of the film marks an escalation in the PP's campaign to destabilise the PSOE government and reverse the result of the 2004 elections. The PP's think tank, the Foundation for the Analysis of Social Studies (FAES), produced the film for a meeting entitled “Free elections and their enemies: terrorism and radical agitation.”

The FAES is presided over by the former PP prime minister, Jose Maria Aznar, and is dedicated to promoting free market “radicalism” in Spain, modelled on the policies pursued by the Bush administration in the United States.

The film accuses the “left” (i.e., all those who didn't support the PP in the elections) of engaging in “two days of political agitation aiming at influencing the voting intentions of citizens” and of using antidemocratic methods to seize power by organising protest demonstrations on March 13 outside PP headquarters on the “day of reflection”—the day before the general election poll when all political campaigning is prohibited by law.

More sinister still, the documentary accuses the PSOE and the “left” of performing a “theatrical display rehearsed months before” in order to “seed the streets with hatred” and “blame the government for the massacre.”

This implies collaboration by the PSOE with the Islamic fundamentalist perpetrators of the Madrid bombings.

The use of such political amalgams is an old trick of the Francoites, of which Aznar is very familiar. As a youth he described himself as an “independent Falangist” and was chosen by former Franco minister Manuel Fraga to lead the transformation of the hated Francoite Peoples Alliance into the Popular Party. The Falange's attitude towards the PSOE before the Civil War (1936-1939) was summed up in a letter from Jose Antonio Primo de Rivera (the founder of the fascist Falange) to Franco, stating, “A socialist victory has the significance of a foreign invasion.”

The making of *After the Massacre* follows a number of virulent statements by senior Popular Party officials describing PSOE ministers as defenders of terrorists and traitors to Spain's nationalist Catholic traditions.

Aznar rejected the last election results from the very beginning. On July 5, 2004, the day before the official Commission of Inquiry into the Madrid bombings commenced, he declared, “Terrorists had

achieved their goal in toppling the government.”

Aznar continued, “It is difficult to recall another day so profoundly antidemocratic as March 13.... Those responsible for the protests are part of the left and they have the worst stains around their necks.”

On November 29, 2004, Aznar's testimony to the Commission of Inquiry was framed as a denunciation of the PSOE for allowing the working class to bring down his government. He described as “unprecedented harassment of a government” the “fabrication” of the theory that his administration “was hiding information.” He added, “It was others who lied.... They perverted the truth and effectively supported a most serious breach of the rules of our democracy.”

Outside the venue of the commission, the police had to separate PP demonstrators from the families of March 11 victims. All this happened even after the PSOE and the PP had concluded, before the commencement of proceedings, a gentleman's agreement that regardless of the commission's findings no former minister would face prosecution.

Aznar has established close relations with the political forces that devised the Bush administration's rise to power. The FAES web site advertises speeches by such figures as Richard Perle and Robert Kagan. The PP conducts itself in the US like a government in exile. Ever since he was driven from office, Aznar has maintained access to the White House and during his visits to Washington has attacked the PSOE and the Spanish masses.

The PP's attempt to equate the PSOE with the mass movement that brought down the Aznar government is nonsense. Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero was in every respect an undeserving beneficiary of the political radicalisation of the population. And on taking power, he and his government have done everything possible to distance themselves from the pre-election movement against Aznar, and restore some form of political consensus.

During his own testimony to the Commission of Inquiry on December 13, Zapatero declared truthfully, “We didn't know, or plan, or participate, or initiate or support any of the protests on March 13. That day thousands of people were spontaneously brought to the point of such indignation that they assembled and protested.”

The PSOE's attempts at “national reconciliation” with the PP have only emboldened the PP and the more overtly far-right forces to step up their attacks.

During last year's Columbus Day military parade, PSOE Defence Minister Jose Bono invited veterans of Franco's fascist Blue Division to participate alongside the Spanish Le Clerc Division, which fought with the French resistance after fleeing Spain at the end of the Civil War.

When Bono was criticised for his decision, he retorted that “if you

left out all Spaniards you may not agree with—the Conquistadors, the Carlists and the fascists—you wouldn't have many people left. It's all Spain."

On January 22 of this year, Bono attended an anti-terrorist rally organised by the pro-PP Association of the Victims of Terrorism (AVT), where he was reportedly surrounded by a group of "well-heeled" men and women who shouted insults, including that he was a "liar" and an "assassin." He was punched several times and others attempted to strike him with a flagpole.

On April 16, a highly organised gang attacked the participants in a public debate at the Crisol bookshop in Madrid. Five people were injured and the shop was wrecked. The focus of the attack was the 90-year-old former general secretary of the Spanish Communist Party (PCE), Santiago Carrillo. Those attending the event included former PSOE minister Claudio Aranzadi, the historian Santos Julia, journalists Pedro Sanchez Ramon and Maria Antonio Iglesias.

The event was held to publicise a new book, *Historia de las dos Españas* (History of the Two Spains), written by Santos Julia. Its subject is the "ideological origins" of the Spanish Civil War. When Carrillo arrived, the mob rushed him as he entered, shouting "murderer," and unfurled the Spanish national flag. After being prevented from attacking Carrillo, they used the flagpoles to beat Santos Julia and journalist Maria Antonio Iglesias, who said, "When they saw who I was they tried to stuff pamphlets in my mouth."

The day after the assault, the Falange, one of the groups that claims the heritage of the original Falange Espanol, held a protest rally in Madrid denouncing the removal of Franco statues from squares throughout Spain and the PSOE's proposals to transform Franco's Valle de los Caidos (Valley of the Fallen) into a memorial to the consequences of fascism. The monument houses the graves of both Franco and Primo de Rivera.

Speaking at the rally, Falange leader Jose Fernando Cantalapiedra refused to condemn the attack at the bookshop, describing it as a "logical response" to the appearance of Carrillo. Those on the march gave the Franco salute and chanted "Carrillo, murderer" and "Zapatero, terrorist."

On November 3 of last year, parliament approved a motion calling for the withdrawal from public places of the hundreds of "fascist and therefore anti-constitutional" symbols still being displayed around the country. The motion was supported by all parties except the Popular Party.

Since the general election, the experiences of the Civil War have become a major arena of ideological and political confrontation in Spanish society. The violent assaults carried out by the far right come after what is described as a "Francoist backlash" by "revisionist" historians seeking to rehabilitate Franco's 1936 fascist uprising.

Disputes over every aspect of the Franco era now impact directly on contemporary political affairs. To cite just one example, representatives of the Popular Party have threatened the PSOE with violent resistance to its decision on April 15 to return 3 percent of what are known as the "Salamanca Papers" to Catalonia's political parties and trade unions, while leaving authenticated copies behind. The papers are made up of archives stolen by the fascists during the Civil War. They include 300,000 files and 1,000 photographs stored in 507 cardboard boxes seized in areas conquered by the fascists and sent to Salamanca in 1940 for "processing." The material was turned into a huge file index containing details of the political opponents of the Franco regime. They were then used to prepare the execution of approximately 200,000 of the Falange's political opponents between

1936 and 1943, to imprison 500,000 and force a similar number to flee Spain in fear of their lives.

When the proposal to return some of the papers to the organisations and individuals from which they had been stolen was first agreed, the PP mayor of Salamanca, Julian Lanzarote, responded by erecting a barricade around the military library. He declared, "Not one document is leaving this city no matter what anyone says."

As well as threatening legal action, Lanzarote declared, "We are on the alert and we will mobilise because this is a subject that is lodged deep in our hearts".

Salamanca has long been a bastion of the right. It was the location of Franco's first headquarters during his fascist uprising. It was also where he was first elected as the leader of the coalition of fascist and nationalist forces, and it provided the main base from which the mass slaughter that took place in all areas controlled by the fascists from 1936 onwards was directed.

In the immediate aftermath of the March 14 election, it was the small fascist groups that demanded a confrontation with the PSOE and the movement that brought it to power. But on March 17, *El Pais* reported an anonymous senior PP official explaining that "the tone of confrontation is spreading almost by osmosis to many intermediate level leaders in our party, so that there is getting to be an accumulation of very virulent statements."

The Popular Party is fighting a one-sided political conflict. Its campaign of provocations has been met at every juncture with a placatory response. The PSOE has refused to mobilise the mass movement that brought them into office to resist the attacks being made against it. It fears the intervention of the working class in political life far more than it does the threat from the right. Its central objective is to stabilise bourgeois rule after the enormous crisis surrounding the PP's election debacle. The result has been to hand the political initiative over to the right wing and a small band of fascist thugs.

This has been the historical role of the PSOE, ever since its embrace of Primo de Rivera's military coup of September 13, 1923, when the party's executive committee issued instructions to its members not to provoke the dictatorship while it helped to reorganise labour relations.

Leon Trotsky observed in 1931, "Yesterday, the Social Democracy clung with its right arm to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Today it clings with its left arm to the Republicans. The principal aim of the Socialists, who do not and cannot have an independent policy, is participation in a solid bourgeois government. To this end they would not refuse to make peace even with the monarchists if it came to that."



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